

Communication is Key

RESEARCHERS AT UO RECEIVE FUNDING TO STUDY HOW INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 AFFECTS PEOPLE

By Taylor Perse

As the world dives deeper into the unprecedented battle against COVID-19, people are becoming more inundated with information about the virus every day. In looking at this, researchers at the University of Oregon are figuring out how this information affects behavior.

Professor Ellen Peters and other faculty received the funding to conduct research on communication during the coronavirus pandemic. The research is funded by the National Science Foundation, which can provide rapid funds in situations where the research is time-sensitive.

Peters is the Philip H. Knight Chair at UO's School of Journalism and Communication and the Director of the Center for Science Communication Research (SCR).

"This is nothing like we expected," Peters says of the coronavirus. "What we are interested in doing is [this research] during a national crisis."

Peters and the other researchers are looking into people's emotional reactions and their behaviors over time. In studying these factors, she will observe outside influences, like the news.

The goal of the research is to better understand the psychological processes that are involved in people's reaction to a pandemic like this. They are hoping to see a link between what people are exposed to in the media and how it affects the brain, especially because there is a lot of fear floating around right now.

Peters says they will be sending out surveys and are already beginning to collect data. In addition to Peters,



ELLEN PETERS

other members of the SCR help with the research include Brittany Shoots-Reinhard, Michael Silverstein and Raleigh Goodwin. Two journalism faculty members, Senyo Ofori-Parku and Scott Maier, will conduct a content analysis of the media involved in the study.

One of these behaviors we've seen already, Peters says, is people stocking up on food and other items in fear of the virus spreading. This can cause a chain reaction, leading to others wanting to stock up as well.

As of right now, Peters says, people are being exposed to a ton of information regarding the coronavirus. Much

of this information, she says, is necessary because people need to be prepared. But a lot of what is out there scares people.

"It's a lot of negative and scary information for people," Peters says. "Sometimes the information can be helpful and other times it's overwhelming."

So far, she's observed that some information that is being shared between people and the media often doesn't tell the entire story. Sometimes the numbers are not as proportionate or accurate, she says. In order to mitigate fear and assuage some of the panic, people should be aware of what types of information they are seeing and how it aligns with other numbers.

Peters and her colleagues have already published two pieces in their early data collecting of the pandemic, one with *The New York Times* and the other with the National Science Foundation. She says they first were interested in who people trusted more for information.

"People are more persuaded and act on recommendations by local sources. So we ask a series of questions of who people trust or might not trust," Peters says.

She says she found that, expectedly, who people trusted during the early outbreak aligned with political divisions. Republicans trusted President Donald Trump, whereas Democrats trusted other groups more than the president.

They also found that everybody trusted other groups, including doctors and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), more than the president.

If people are already feeling too inundated with the amount of information regarding COVID-19, Peters recommends taking a little break from the news.

"Ask yourself if it's helping you to prepare better," she says.

And if it is, she adds, think critically about the numbers being presented. If you see how many people are hospitalized from the virus, look it at as how many people don't have to be hospitalized.

"Presenting both sides gives more context to people. Because of the way our minds work, it gives both sides of the story and helps people understand the greater context," she says. ■

New to You Gear

A NEW STORE IN EUGENE WANTS TO LET YOU TRY SPORTS GEAR BEFORE INVESTING BIG MONEY

By Corrin Avchin

A new sports consignment store wants to make sports gear environmentally friendly by recycling gear — and make sports gear more affordable. Eugene Gear Traders, owned and managed by Bevin Helm, opened March 1.

Helm grew up in all over the U.S., including Eugene, and now she says she has come back to town with a goal of helping people try new sports, get gear and not break the bank.

"Don't buy an expensive mountain bike before knowing if you even like the sport," Helm says.

Customers can consign gear and apparel — meaning sellers make a deal with the storeowner who sells the item and then both consignee and the store itself make a profit.

Born in Bellevue, Washington, Helm quickly started a life of travel. At eight, Helm moved to the Big Island of Hawaii with her parents, where she soon became an athlete.

Helm had an untraditional childhood — her father was a triathlon trainer and the family grew up in a sports hostel on the Big Island. When she was 16, the family picked up



BEVIN HELM

and moved to Eugene.

Helm has been involved in sports throughout her life, and that influenced her decision to open a sporting goods consignment shop.

"I was 19 when I managed and was a buyer for a surf shop in North Bend," she says, "The shop was called Oregon Surf Shop. I began saving, traveling and surfing during that time. I spent a lot of time in Mexico and also

traveled back to Hawaii and Indonesia." Helm says she returned to retail after moving to Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

Over the years, Helm homed in on her favorite sports to participate in: skiing, mountain biking and surfing. With the store opening, she hopes to make a small difference not just in the community but also around the world.

"I believe in creating a business that will help as many people as possible explore new sports and the outdoors," she says. "It is also really important for me to have an environmentally friendly business. The apparel industry has been very cruel environmentally."

For the past five years, Helm and her family lived in Bend, where she says there were already too many consignment stores, so, when the opportunity came up to move to Eugene, Helm took the chance to open a shop on this side of the Cascades.

"The outdoor industry with brands like Patagonia, Prana and Outerknown, are just a few that are leading the way," Helm says. "I hope to be a part of reusing all the great, still very good gear that is more affordable so people can start or try sports they may not know if they want to invest in yet."

Helm's advice for those who may want to try a new sport but are possibly intimidated is to start out with how comfortable you are, figure out what you want to do and then go with people who are excited to show you.

"Rent the gear you are using before you buy the expensive gear," she says. ■

The official grand opening of Eugene Gear Traders was set for March 16 but the store is already open. Eugene Gear Traders is located at 233 W. 5th Avenue. For more information, visit EugeneGearTraders.com.