



## The Program

# Communications office serves program through expertise and innovation

**T**he increasing specialization and technological complexity of the modern world make the need for reliable interpretation, synthesis, and distribution of technical and scientific information more important than ever. On matters relating to the ocean and coast, Oregon Sea Grant seeks to address that need.

Although Sea Grant has faculty devoted to efforts in research, education, and extension, as well as communications, a common goal of all their work is, ultimately, communication of results—among peers, between different groups, and to diverse audiences. The faculty of Sea Grant Communications are different from other Sea Grant faculty partly by training but mainly in that they devote all their attention to the methods and ends of professional communications.

During 1999–2000, the staff of Oregon Sea Grant Communications includes a managing editor; a science writer, publicist, and Webmaster; a video producer; a publication designer; a publication coordinator; and the assistant director for communications, who also serves occasionally as a writer and video producer. A measure of importance the program attaches to communications is that the office's leader, the assistant director, is a part of the program management team and is involved in all program decision making.

Not surprisingly, the office produces a wide variety of materials



Sea Grant assistant director Joe Cone oversees the communications office and advances innovative technologies to reach a growing constituency.

in various media and formats, including pamphlets, fact sheets, books, news releases, newsletters, Web sites, videotapes, and radio programming. Most of these are done at the request of, and with some participation from, our colleagues in Sea Grant administration, Extension, research, and education—including the Visitor Center of Oregon State University's Hatfield Marine Science Center. We also pay for and distribute reprints of research articles published in professional journals.

The Sea Grant Communications office serves as a public

information office, a small publisher, and a multimedia production studio all rolled into one. We are not just a “production shop,” however. Our office's expertise is to identify whether a news release, a Web page, or a professional workshop, for example, would best meet an identified information need. Unlike a commercial operation, we are not driven by the mere existence of markets or the desire to exploit markets. Our mission is public service.

But do we do anything distinctive in pursuit of this mission?

We like to think so.

## Assessment

Our desire to serve the public makes us ask what information users want from us and then check back with them to ask how we're doing. For example, we organize focus groups when we want to know how representative individuals define a particular information need. We routinely include return-addressed feedback cards with many of our publications and with all of our videos. We also undertake more extensive surveys, periodically, to better understand the information needs of various groups.

In 1997, for instance, we supported and helped design a systematic survey of Oregon coast residents to determine their attitudes about the restoration of salmon and watersheds, in which Sea Grant—and the state and federal governments—were investing significant resources. What we learned from 500 respondents was not only statistically valid, but valuable to us and others in developing further educational materials that would be relevant and useable for this important environmental issue.

## Partnerships

Sea Grant Communications is fortunate to be part of a national network and a local program that place high value on partnerships with others. Our partnerships with other state and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and others allow us to extend our resources and benefit from the

sharing of expertise and capabilities. One example is our long-standing partnership with the Oregon State Marine Board, the state's recreational boating agency whose mission to provide boating safety education and information overlaps with part of Sea Grant's own mission.

Over more than 25 years, Oregon Sea Grant has produced, marketed, and updated a popular, free guidebook, *Boating in Oregon Coastal Waters*, while the marine board has paid the printing. In 1997, Extension Sea Grant's Bruce DeYoung and intern Rob Neeley surveyed a sampling of coastal recreational boaters to gauge the publication's value and ways to improve it. The readers overwhelmingly urged this publication be republished and suggested improvements, most of which were implemented in the 1999 revision.

The marine board also helped support DeYoung's development of the pioneering CD-ROM, *Dangerous Waters!*, which Communications markets and distributes. Nearly 500 copies of this CD—which helps users learn safe boating practices through an enjoyable, interactive game—have been sold nationwide for educational displays and recreational boating industry exhibits.

## Innovative Use of Technology

Oregon Sea Grant employs a variety of electronic information technologies in planned and appropriate ways, in an attempt to

reach identified audiences. We are deliberately innovative and exploratory with these technologies—to be aware of what is state-of-the-art and to advance it, if possible. A couple of quick examples of this mind-set are our use of video and of low power radio. (Our early adoption and current use of Internet technology is the subject of another report in this series.)

Oregon is one of the few Sea Grant programs that has invested in video production equipment and staffing, for the simple reason that we recognize the power of the video medium and its high acceptance by larger audiences. We produce diverse programming for broadcast, educational, and outreach use and have been experimenting with distributing video through our World Wide Web site.

In collaboration again with Bruce DeYoung, we have also been innovators in the use of low power radio (LPR)—a low cost, short-range AM radio technology. LPR is ideal for providing localized safety and resource stewardship information, as well as site-specific environmental or cultural information. In 1998–2000, we have produced interpretive programming for four different installations along the Oregon coast and are producing an educational video which describes the use of the technology nationwide.