

What Makes for a Successful Researcher?

Summer research workshops provide practical skills to new researchers

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Being a successful researcher involves much more than just conducting research—a researcher must also be a strong communicator, a participant in the greater scientific community, a motivated team player and teachable advisee.

However, these skills are not always directly taught in classroom environments, which led Dr. Shawna Hollen, assistant professor in UNH's [Department of Physics and Astronomy](#), to organize a series of summer research workshops. The workshops began three years ago as a professional development component of a larger NSF-funded research project on the physics of two-dimensional materials, with support from the [UNH Graduate School](#).

The purpose of these workshops is to provide a framework to orient and train new researchers on UNH's campus in the practical skills of scientific research. Now in its third summer running, this year's workshop series drew a consistently diverse crowd from all different disciplines and levels. The audience included local students, teachers, and visitors spanning from the high school, undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education levels.

The workshops featured different field experts each week, alternating between skill-based workshops and "Research Talks".



The skill-based workshops covered technical writing, time management, presentation skills, research ethics, mentorship, and science communication. Presenters included faculty, staff, and administrators: Senior Associate in the [Research Development Office](#) Michael Thompson presented on grant writing, while Graduate School Dean Cari Moorhead and Assistant Dean Dovev Levine presented on mentorship.

The Research Talks included two presentations from Principal Investigators—Professor Jesse Stabile-Morrell from the [College of Life Sciences and Agriculture](#) on nutrition science and Professor Amy Keesee from the [College of Engineering and Physical Sciences](#) on space science. In addition, one Research Talk featured several [Three Minute Thesis](#) (3MT) graduate student participants from this past year.

The specific topics, as well as the length and frequency of the workshops, have been guided by feedback from attendees and refined each year. The general format for each workshop included complimentary lunch, a thirty-minute presentation, time for questions, and small group discussions.

I found the 3MT session to be particularly valuable as it illuminated my weaknesses in presenting research to a broad audience and offered a guide for improvement. “The workshops provided an opportunity to hear from experts on challenging aspects of our careers that we are beginning to encounter,” said Ben St. Laurent, a Ph.D. candidate in UNH's [Graduate Physics Program](#). “I found the 3MT session to be particularly valuable as it illuminated my weaknesses in presenting research to a broad audience and offered a guide for improvement.”

Part of what makes these workshops valuable is that they direct participants to resources that are already available to them in their research career, as well as expose them to individuals who have the wisdom of experience and are willing to share. According to Dr. Julie Simpson from the [UNH Research Office](#), who presented on research ethics, the success of the series is also about the summer timing, when “there is a lot of research occurring on campus and where people may have more flexibility in their schedules.”

“We are eager to find new input and new audiences for possible expansion, especially from groups already supporting the professional development needs of summer researchers,” said Dr. Hollen. “Going forward, we hope this series can help to centralize already existing efforts of various groups hosting summer researchers.”

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