

Faculty Spotlight

UWO
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OSHKOSH



Dr. Gregory Kleinheinz, Professor, Engineering & Engineering Technology

Could you tell us about your research interests?

I currently serve as the Viessman Chair for Sustainable Technology, Chair for the Department of Engineering and Engineering Technology, and Director of the Environmental Research and Innovation Center. I started at UW Oshkosh in 1999.

What research projects are you currently working on? What would you like your next project to be?

We currently have several major research areas, but in general we research contemporary questions in freshwater issues. This includes sources of fecal contamination, sustainable reengineering of beaches, emerging contaminants in freshwater, and most currently the fate and transport of marine debris and microplastics in the Great Lakes. We continue to be a leader in the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin and that has allowed us to bring students from many UW campuses to UW Oshkosh to train at the ERIC or one of our field lab sites. These students are invaluable to accomplishing the work that is needed on each project. We anticipate that marine debris and microplastics will be our primary focus for the next 5-8 years. We have been fortunate to receive substantial funding for this work already and have several new proposals in the works that will continue this work on the Great Lakes. While the overarching objective is the removal and characterization of marine debris fate and transport, we anticipate a number of smaller research projects spinning off of the main work. In all cases we will have students leading the work we do both in the field and lab.

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What challenges have you faced in your career to date? What have you learned from those experiences?

There is always a cycle of support that exists in higher education. This depends on the others you may need to work with outside your research but are required to accomplish your research within the confines of the university. Within this cycle you will have times of great support and other times with minimal support. My advice is to learn the systems and procedures that are needed to conduct your research 'business'. Understand why things work a certain way. By being more independent and understanding the why behind the processes and systems we use you can get them to work for you in times with minimal institutional support. While it can be frustrating that these efforts are not directly doing the research you are passionate about, they are part of managing a research program and/or project. If you can save time and energy on these activities, you will have more for the research itself.

Can you share your experiences applying and receiving extramural funding?

My philosophy on applying for extramural funding is to be open to many sources of funding and diversify your funding sources. By doing this you are able to build a sustainable and continuously funded research program at UW Oshkosh. I believe that you need to swing for the fences at times, but there is also 'low hanging fruit' that will fund your research with a higher probability of funding success. Develop a strategy to incorporate all of these sources into your funding portfolio. Make sure you understand the RFP and adapt your work or pitch to the RFP, do not expect the funding agency to adapt to your work. In my time at UW Oshkosh, I have received over \$20 million in extramural funds from private corporations, the State of WI, US EPA, USDA, NOAA, Sea Grant, and many others. This funding has allowed for a steady program that has involved over 600 undergraduates and 30 graduate students, coming from over 25 colleges and universities.

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What advice would you give other UW Oshkosh faculty applying for grants?

Seek out those that have been successful and learn what they have done to be successful. I did this in my first two years after my PhD when I was a Research Assistant Professor at Michigan Tech University. The advice those faculty provided was invaluable in building my professional approach to research and extramural funding. Incorporate aspects of these winning strategies into one that is unique to you and your work. Don't reinvent the wheel, learn from those of us that have made mistakes and struggled. When you do not succeed once, get back up and learn from that experience. We do not succeed by being knocked down. We succeed by getting back up and trying again.

Finally, when you become successful stay true to your core values. Others may look at your success and think you are lucky or feel you do not need any support because you are successful. They will not realize all the sleepless nights, many extra hours of hard work, and the stress that it takes for you to succeed. Take a moment to reflect, enjoy the success, and be the best 'professional you' that you can.