



School of Marine and Environmental Affairs

College of the Environment

Summer 2026 Newsletter



Letter from the Director

Dear SMEA Friends!

Greetings from SMEA. We had an exciting spring with presentations of outstanding capstone projects and thesis research, from the sea to the land, from Dungeness crab, fisheries management, ship strike hazards, to subsistence food production, offshore wind, to education, critical mineral mining, labor rights, and climate change policy implementation. You can watch recordings of these presentations [here](#). We celebrated our graduates' accomplishments, including outstanding thesis research and the impact our students make on our communities. Our Emerita Professor, Terrie Klinger, addressed our graduates as they embarked on their new careers.

Our alumni continue to do vital work in marine and environmental governance and management. I encourage you to read the piece by Professor Emeritus Dave Fluharty entitled "Washed in on the tide." I am sure there are many more exciting alumni updates that escaped our radar. Please do send those to Hailie Borges, Assistant to the Director, to be shared with our community in our newsletters and on social media. You will also enjoy the interview with our Alumna, Tanya Pelach ('21) by Hailie Borges in the "Alumni Spotlight" section.

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The faculty are concluding a busy academic year. We appointed a new Assistant Professor, Dr. Shana Hirsch, who will be joining us in September. Please read about her work and the new expertise she brings to SMEA here. In the Winter 2026 quarter, our new Professor of Practice, Stephen Metruck, and Professor Emeritus Dave Fluharty offered an outstanding speaker series entitled “[Building a Port for the Future](#)”.

It was wonderful to hear from esteemed leaders, such as Commissioner Toshiko Hasegawa, and Captain Mark McDonnell, Sector Commander, U.S. Coast Guard Puget Sound, as well as many SMEA alumni working at Port of Seattle. This year, SMEA faculty also made important progress in implementing our strategic development plan by designing an initial proposal for a new one-year graduate degree in Environmental Management. Associate Professor Anne Beaudreau was instrumental in this effort, and she will continue leading this process through the university review and approval in the upcoming academic year.

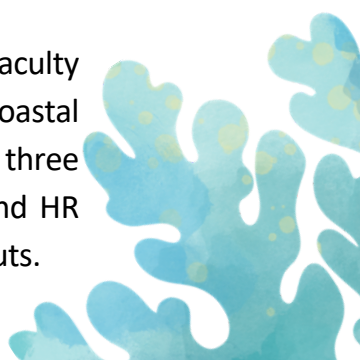
Our activities have now shifted to the summer schedule of research and administrative work preparing for a new academic and fiscal year. Faculty and rising second-year students are in the field, conducting research. Thanks to the generosity of SMEA alumni and friends like you, we will be able to provide partial funding to support the completion of our second-year students’ work, totaling nearly \$70,000. Your support is always important, but it has become essential now when so many other sources of state and federal funding have been cut or eliminated. If you are able to make a gift at this point, you can do so [here](#). Thank you!

We are also preparing for our largest incoming class (42 admitted applicants are scheduled to join us in September). Again, your support is vital. Thanks to your generosity, we were able to combine your donations with the funding from the UW Graduate Schools and the College of the Environment to offer three incoming students one year of full funding (tuition and stipend). This is a vital tool for our recruitment of outstanding applicants who often have offers of funding from our peer institutions.

While your donations are vital for strengthening SMEA’s ability to educate future leaders in marine and environmental affairs, our alumni and friends have been supporting our students and their learning in many other ways. You partner with us in developing capstone projects, you return to SMEA to talk to current students about your careers in marine and environmental fields, you mentor them as they build their networks, you read about our work and re-post our important accomplishments in your social networks, and help SMEA in many other ways.

Allow me to end this letter on a personal note. After 24 purple years, I am leaving UW to join Georgetown University. My time at UW has been one of great joy and professional growth. I am grateful for all opportunities provided to me by the University and the College of the Environment. I want to thank Dean Thornton and his entire office for their commitment to our school, the work we do, and the wellbeing of our students, staff, and faculty. I want to thank my colleagues, faculty and staff at SMEA, who work very hard and very collegially.

During my two terms as the SMEA director, we were able to hire three tenure track faculty and appoint two professors of practice, bringing vital new expertise in marine and coastal affairs to UW. In recognition of their professional contributions, we also promoted three faculty. And all of that through a difficult time of the overhaul of the UW financial and HR system, global pandemic, significant federal research funding decline, and state budget cuts.



I want to express deep gratitude to SMEA Director's Council, a determined group of SMEA alumni and supporters, led by Dan Hull, who saw my vision for the school and trusted my ability to deliver. Thank you for joining the council and for your unstinting support. Because of your generosity and hard work, SMEA has new resources to recruit outstanding applicants, new resources to support the research of students in their second year, a new faculty fellowship, a regular biennial community meeting, and an active alumni network.

I wish you all a wonderful summer. Please be on the lookout for an announcement from Dean Joel Thornton about SMEA's new Director in July.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Nives Dolšak". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Nives" and last name "Dolšak" clearly distinguishable.

Nives Dolšak, Outgoing Director

SMEA Celebrates the Class of 2026

On Thursday, June 11, 2026, the School of Marine and Environmental Affairs celebrated the Class of 2026, honoring 29 students who earned their Master of Marine Affairs (MMA) degrees. These graduates now join an esteemed community of nearly 1,000 alumni and world-class policymakers dedicated to building a resilient future in marine and environmental affairs.

The ceremony began with opening remarks from SMEA Director Dr. Nives Dolšak, followed by a speech from nominated class speaker Maddie Gard. The keynote address was delivered by SMEA Emeritus Professor Terrie Klinger.

This year, we are proud to recognize three exceptional students with awards:

Anna Lewis is this year's recipient of the 2026 McKernan Thesis of the Year Award for her outstanding thesis, *Beyond Supply Chains: A Just Mining Index for Assessing Critical Mineral Sources*. Her research explores the environmental, social, and human rights impacts of sourcing critical minerals needed for the global energy transition. Using data from 174 countries, Anna developed a new index to evaluate each country's ability to support fair and responsible mining practices. Her work highlights the trade-offs between supply chain security, human rights, and environmental justice, offering a valuable tool for shaping future investments and partnerships in critical mineral development.

Hannia Larino and Isaac Olson are this year's recipients of the 2026 JEDI & Community Service Award for their outstanding leadership in advancing justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and community at SMEA. Through revitalizing the Diversity Forum, organizing Know Your Rights trainings, and community townhalls, advocating for support for non-citizen students, and creating space for education, dialogue, and solidarity, Hannia and Isaac have helped foster a more welcoming and engaged community. Their dedication to building meaningful connections across cohorts and turning student concerns into action has had a lasting impact on SMEA and reflects a deep commitment to equity, advocacy, and collective care.

Congratulations to the class of 2026!



2026 Capstone and Thesis Showcase: Research, Innovation, and Impact

The 2026 capstone and thesis projects at SMEA showcased a diverse range of interdisciplinary research addressing important environmental and social issues. Capstone partnered with communities and organizations to address real-world environmental challenges, including tribal perspectives on offshore wind development, fish barrier removal coordination with the South Whidbey Basin, and the continuation of Chief Leschi School's food forest. Thesis students conducted independent research on topics ranging from critical mineral sourcing, forced labor in fisheries, and vessel strike reduction. Together, these projects reflect SMEA's commitment to advancing innovative research, community collaboration, and solutions-oriented approaches to complex environmental issues.

Below is a list of our students' projects and links to watch their presentations

Capstones:

May 15th, 2026:

Maya Ades, Sawyer Jenkins, and Dietrich Truman: Assessing the Prevalence of Forced Labor Indicators in the US North Pacific Albacore Tuna Fishery (11 a.m.) [Link](#)

Rebecca Ballantyne, Margaret Jelsma, and Jane Wybenga: Tribal Perspectives on Offshore Wind Development & Tribal Benefit Agreements (11:50 a.m.) [Link](#)

Eitan Gerstle, Erica Mackenzie, and Elise Wilson-Leedy: Addressing Data Gaps and Coordination Challenges in Fish Barrier Removal in the South Whidbey Basin (1:45 p.m.) [Link](#)

May 22nd, 2026

Josh Hymes, Marissa Scott, and Miriam Stearns: Communicating Subsistence Management to Broaden Pathways for Public Engagement in Southeast Alaska (11 a.m.) [Link](#)

Will Burnham and Zoe DeGrande: Taking Root: Reflections on Collaborative Food Forest Creation with Chief Leschi Schools (11:30 a.m.) [Link](#)

Thesis:

May 15th, 2026:

Anna Lewis: Beyond Supply Chains: A just mining index for assessing critical mineral sources (10 a.m.) [Link](#)

Justin Hirsch: Assessing the Prevalence of Forced Labor Indicators in the US North Pacific Albacore Tuna Fishery (10:30 a.m.) [Link](#)

Isaac Olson: Comparing ocean acidification communication strategies and effectiveness in marine education centers (2:30 p.m.) [Link](#)

Emma Klessig: How Countries Frame Their Climate Commitments: Explaining Cross-National Variation in NDC Policy Implementation Specificity (3 p.m.) [Link](#)

May 22nd, 2026

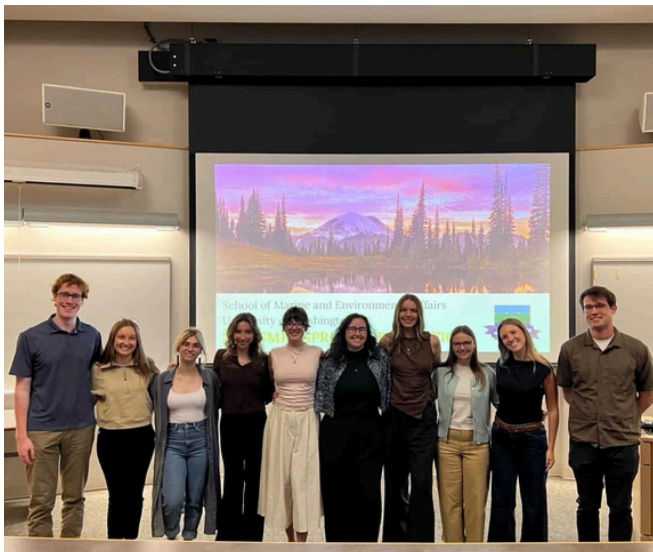
Hannah Brown: Dungeness crab (*Metacarcinus Magister*) molt data utility in life-stage linkages and abundance estimates in Puget Sound (10:30 a.m.) [Link](#)

Emily Bews: Predictive habitat suitability modeling of *Nereocystis Luetkeana* in San Juan County, WA (2 p.m.) [Link](#)

Meredith Dirkman: Economic Valuation of the Ecosystem Services Provided by *Nereocystis Luetkeana* in the Puget Sound (2:30 p.m.) [Link](#)

Marisa Campbell: A probabilistic framework for evaluating ship strike hazard and the effectiveness of vessel speed reduction policies (3 p.m.) [Link](#)

Maddie Gard: Blooming Concerns: *Alexandrium Catenella* in Puget Sound (3:30 p.m.) [Link](#)



Meet SMEA's Newest Faculty

Member: Shana Hirsch

We are excited to welcome Dr. Shana Hirsch as the newest faculty member at SMEA. As a qualitative social scientist with a background in natural resource politics, policy, and management, Shana's work explores how emerging technologies shape sustainability, environmental management, and climate resilience. Her research spans offshore wind, wave, and tidal energy, and the environmental monitoring and restoration technologies, with a strong focus on how these innovations impact communities, policy, and equity.

Learn more about Dr. Shana Hirsch in our interview below!

1. What drew you to the School of Marine and Environmental Affairs at the University of Washington?

It is one of the rare spaces within the University that is truly interdisciplinary and where scholarship is being directly applied to solving real-world problems. I love the breadth of research and expertise within the department, and the fact that my job is going to be to support graduate students to use the tools of academia to become change-makers in the world. That is so exciting to me.

2. Your research explores how emerging technologies shape sustainability and environmental management. What first sparked your interest in this area?

Looking back at my academic path, most of my work has been about how people and societies adapt to changes, either in terms of climate change, land-use change, or technological change. We are really living in a time where new technologies are shaping the way that we interact with the environment on all levels, from our individual values to our societal responses. I think what first really sparked my interest in this was when I witnessed the shift to renewable energy in my home country of Scotland. A fairly rapid shift happened there starting in the early 2000's, when the government decided to go 100% renewable, which is a big deal for a country which relied on oil for a large part of its economy. I saw how these new technologies--wind, wave, and tidal energy--were really changing the ways that people viewed the environment, and marine space particularly, which of course opened up a whole national debate about values, the environment, and the futures that people wanted to work toward.



3. What can students look forward to in your courses or in working with you as a faculty member at SMEA?

Mentoring is a passion of mine and I am excited to work with SMEA students and support them in their own goals. I'm going to be developing some new courses--one focused on social, technical, political, and environmental aspects of ocean energy, and another that will support students in developing community-engaged research skills.

4. Looking ahead, what do you see as the most exciting opportunities or pressing challenges in marine and environmental affairs, particularly in areas like offshore wind, marine energy, or environmental monitoring?

Anyone who cares about the natural world can see the challenges we face. We also witness the devastating impacts that humans are having not just on ecosystems, but on each other. I think our biggest challenge is to keep hope at the forefront of our work so that we can have the energy to move forward and toward the futures we want to live. SMEA is a place where this edge, of the reality of these challenges, and the possibilities for change, meet. I think that understanding how technologies are impacting the environment and our relationships is one piece of that larger picture.



5. As you prepare to join SMEA, is there anything you're especially excited about, either in your research, teaching, or becoming part of the UW community?

I work closely with the Pacific Marine Energy Center, and I have some great opportunities for SMEA students to engage with the work we are doing there. I know that marine energy might not be on everyone's radar, but it provides a fascinating area of research, from environmental impacts to energy sovereignty and everything in between.

Learn more about Shana and her work through her [faculty page](#).



Featured Alumni: Tanya Pelach (2021)

Tanya Pelach is a citizen of the Quinault Indian Nation and serves as Deputy Director of the Quinault Indian Nation's Division of Natural Resources. In this role, she helps lead efforts to steward and protect Tribal lands, waters, and treaty-reserved resources, supporting the Nation's long-term environmental and cultural priorities.

Before joining the Quinault Indian Nation, Tanya served as the Natural Resource Program Manager for the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI), where she worked on fisheries, forestry, and environmental policy issues affecting Tribal communities throughout the region. Her work fostered collaboration among Tribal leaders and advanced intertribal approaches to addressing shared environmental challenges.

Tanya earned a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies from the University of Washington Tacoma and a Master of Marine Affairs from the University of Washington School of Marine and Environmental Affairs (SMEA). Her graduate research examined inequities in Tribal access and participation within a Washington State floodplain management program, reflecting her commitment to advancing environmental justice and Tribal sovereignty.



Today, Tanya continues to champion Tribal stewardship and resource management while helping strengthen partnerships that support the health of ecosystems and communities across the Pacific Northwest. Outside of work, she enjoys cooking, camping, and walking the beach with her husband—also a SMEA alumnus—and their dogs, Callie and George.

Check out our interview with Tanya below:



How did your experience as a student at SMEA influence your career?

My experience as a student at SMEA had a profound impact on my career. One of the most important things it gave me was confidence in myself and my ability to contribute meaningfully to the fields of natural resources and environmental policy. Coming from an Indigenous background, I sometimes found myself navigating spaces where Tribal perspectives were not well understood. SMEA reinforced that those perspectives are not only valuable but essential.

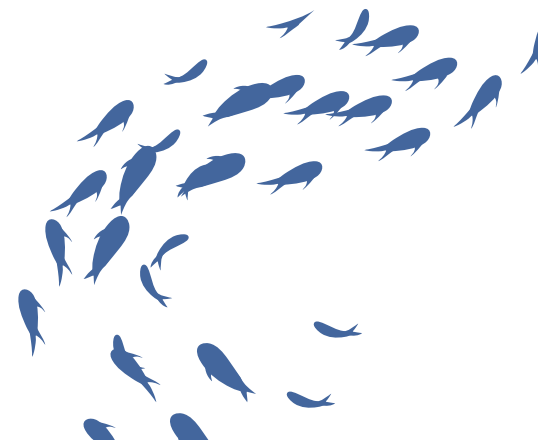
As an Indigenous professional, educating others about Tribes, treaty rights, and Tribal sovereignty remains an important part of my work. SMEA helped me recognize the importance of bringing those conversations into every space and demonstrated how effective policy requires a deeper understanding of the communities it affects.

The program also taught me that our world is deeply interconnected and that relationships matter. The connections I built through SMEA continue to influence my career today, and it showed me the importance of networking, collaboration, and learning from people with diverse backgrounds and expertise.

Perhaps most importantly, my graduate research directly connects to the work I do now. My research focused on identifying inequities and understanding Tribal needs within a floodplain management program in Washington State. Today, I am involved in monitoring ongoing efforts related to the proposed dam development on the Chehalis River, where many of the same themes: equity, Tribal engagement, and the long-term impacts of environmental decision-making remain central. It has been rewarding to see how the skills and knowledge I developed at SMEA continue to inform and support my work in Tribal natural resource management and environmental policy.

One thing I would add is the importance of staying engaged and connected with SMEA after graduation. The value of the program doesn't end when you receive your degree. There are many ways to remain involved, whether that's mentoring current students, participating in alumni events, speaking to classes, or helping create opportunities for students to gain real-world experience through capstones and internships.

I've seen firsthand how impactful these connections can be. For example, while working with the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, I had the opportunity to work with Reuben Martinez to help develop a capstone project. Experiences like that strengthen the relationship between the school and its alumni while giving students valuable professional experience. I fully intend to help create similar opportunities through the Quinault Indian Nation in the future.



SMEA provided me with an outstanding education, a strong professional network, and friendships that have lasted well beyond graduate school. It also played an unexpected role in my personal life—my husband is a SMEA alumnus as well, although we attended in different years and didn't actually meet at SMEA. It's a fun reminder of just how interconnected the SMEA community can be.

Most importantly, I encourage students and alumni alike to stay involved. The relationships you build through SMEA can continue to create opportunities, partnerships, and friendships long after graduation.

What advice do you have for SMEA students and alumni?

My biggest piece of advice for SMEA students and alumni is simple: network, network, network. SMEA alumni are everywhere, and it is always amazing to see how those connections come full circle throughout your career. Whether someone remembers you from a class, shares a connection through SMEA, or knows someone in your network, those relationships often help move important work forward. The environmental and natural resources world can feel surprisingly small, and the connections you build at SMEA can have a lasting impact.

I would also encourage students to take advantage of opportunities outside of their immediate area of study. Attend seminars, lectures, and events hosted by other programs, even if they seem unrelated to your coursework. Some of the most valuable lessons I learned came from talks I attended simply because they sounded interesting. As my career evolved, I found myself drawing on knowledge and perspectives I never expected to use.

Finally, remember that even during the most stressful moments, the experience is worth it. SMEA's interdisciplinary approach is one of its greatest strengths. The program teaches you to think across disciplines, work with people from different backgrounds, and approach complex challenges from multiple perspectives. In my experience, that ability has been incredibly valuable in the workplace and has often been more beneficial than having a very narrow focus on a single subject area. The challenges are real, but the skills, relationships, and experiences you gain along the way are well worth the effort.





Whats next for you?

I think I've found a place where I'll be well-rooted for quite some time. My focus for the foreseeable future is continuing to serve the Quinault Indian Nation and giving back to my community through the work I do. I'm committed to supporting the Nation's natural resources, strengthening Tribal stewardship, and helping ensure that future generations have opportunities to thrive

I also want to continue uplifting and mentoring individuals who are interested in entering the environmental and natural resources fields. Throughout my career, I've benefited from people who were willing to share their knowledge and open doors, and I hope to do the same for others. At the same time, I plan to keep learning. One of the things I appreciate most about this work is that there is always something new to understand, whether it's a policy issue, scientific challenge, or community perspective.

Whenever my time with Quinault eventually comes to an end, I imagine I will still be working in a role that bridges Tribal and non-Tribal communities, likely in a Tribal liaison or education-focused position. I'm passionate about advancing understanding of Tribal sovereignty, treaty rights, and the important role Tribes play in environmental stewardship and resource management.

In the meantime, I encourage anyone who is entering the field, interested in Tribal natural resources, or visiting the Quinault Reservation to reach out. I've found that some of the best opportunities and learning experiences come from simply starting a conversation, and I'm always happy to connect with fellow SMEA students and alumni.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

One thing I would add is the importance of staying engaged and connected with SMEA after graduation. The value of the program doesn't end when you receive your degree. There are many ways to remain involved, whether that's mentoring current students, participating in alumni events, speaking to classes, or helping create opportunities for students to gain real-world experience through capstones and internships.

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Washed in on the Tide

By David Fluharty

What the Tide Washed In

We're always glad to hear about the accomplishments of our graduates. This column is a hit-and-miss collection of things I discover at high tide around my desk, or that are reported to me as found by others or by the individuals themselves. Dear friends, do not be afraid to let me know about the excellent work you are doing – it can inspire others.

Best, Dave Fluharty

Max Baker (2024). Affiliate Faculty Member Dr. Katie Arkema congratulated SMEA alum, Max Perkins, on the publication of his first lead author paper, “Exploring the disaster risk reduction and energy resilience benefits of coastal ecosystems and protected areas in Puerto Rico,” published in *Ecosystem Services* June 2026 Vol. 79:101847) It can be accessed [here](#). Katie Arkema and Jonathan Bakker are co-authors.

This paper is the culmination of a research project that Max began as an undergraduate intern at Pacific Northwest National Laboratories and completed – with a lot of grit – through his senior thesis and then capstone in the Program on Climate Change Graduate Certificate in Climate Science. He is grateful for the support from SMEA classmates and faculty.

The paper applies a spatial model to identify where coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrasses are helping to mitigate coastal hazard risk for nearshore energy infrastructure. The results show the potential for new protected areas to improve electrical grid resilience in coastal communities. By modeling coastal vulnerability under several conservation and degradation scenarios, our replicable approach aims to break down typical silos between energy, disaster, and environment sectors.

Barbara Bennet (2010) visited SMEA recently to meet with Nives Dolšak and attended the Departmental Seminar/SMEA 550A Special Topics Course “The Port of the Future”. She has been active post-SMEA, organizing a Whidbey Island Beach Watchers group for Washington State University Extension and serving on the Island County Marine Resource Committee, providing advice to Island County Commissioners on actions to protect the [marine environment](#). She reports, “It’s wonderful to see how the innovative creation of MRCs is directly impacting local marine priorities, and it is my pleasure to be a part of that story.”

Stacy Hall-Gomez and Eulalie Sullivan (1980) provided enthusiastic and thought-provoking reviews of their careers and gave astute advice to SMEA students in the Special Topics course under the title “Post-SMEA: Can you have it all?” Their participation was well-received by the current SMEA cohorts taking the course, as they face an incredibly uncertain time and a difficult job hunt situation. Alumna Nona Henderson (1981) attended on Zoom.

NOTE: You, too, can participate in the SMEA Speaker Series by Zoom. A list of speakers and topics is available at the start of each quarter on the SMEA website with information on how to attend in person or via Zoom.

Karen Dyson (2009) continued her education in forestry and earned her PhD. She is now employed at the Spatial Informatics Group in Pleasanton, CA. Her recent paper with other authors was published in *Methods in Ecology and Evaluation* under the title, “A distributed large-volume soil sampling approach to spatial heterogeneity in eDNA collection [DOI: 10:1111/2041-210x.70317](https://doi.org/10.1111/2041-210x.70317).

Brett Veehusen (2014) bills himself as a “lifelong Alaskan commercial fisherman, policy expert, strategist, and communicator.” After graduation, he took on the position of Executive Director of Seafood Harvesters of America. In 2017, he founded Ocean Strategies and built the nation’s go-to public affairs firm focused on seafood, fisheries, and marine resources. The firm has served multiple clients across private and non-profit sectors. Brett is also a member of the SMEA Director’s Advisory Council.

Jongseong Ryu (2009) Professor Ryu is a SMEA alumnus from Korea, and wrote with lots of good news. He moved from Anyang University Group to Seo Kyung University in Seoul last year under very favorable conditions. He has now become a well-established, mid-career scientist with substantial influence on Korea's marine and fisheries policy. He is currently serving as a Korean representative on the PICES Human Dimension Committee and also as the chair of the ocean committee at KFEM, the largest environmental NGO in Korea. During the last presidential election, Prof. Ryu participated in developing policy for the new president. Dr Ryu is coming to Seattle for the UW graduation of his daughter with a degree in data science. His son is accepted as an economics major at Vanderbilt University. His wife is still working as a pharmacist at Walgreens in Renton.