

By Anna Lafferre • Photos by Rick Lee

The **NEXT** **Generation** of Faculty

Professors Kevin Law, Anne Axel and Suzanne Konz bring unique education and experience to Marshall

Although they teach in three different departments, one thing unites professors Anne Axel, Suzanne Konz and Kevin Law – passion for their fields.

Dr. Kevin Law

*Associate Professor,
Meteorology, Hurricanes and Physical Geography
College of Liberal Arts*

When most people think of geography, they remember memorizing the state capitals in fifth grade. In fact, the field of geography also encompasses the studies of meteorology, severe storms, weather analysis and climatology – studies that Dr. Kevin Law has made his life's work.

Growing up near Buckhannon, W.Va., as the son of the superintendent of schools, weather was a big part

of Law's early life. His father's job meant always closely tracking the weather to determine if students could safely get to school in the snow or other severe weather.

"Being younger I just followed my dad and really took an interest in the weather," Law said.

Upon graduating from high school, Law went to West Virginia University, where he received his undergraduate degree in geography. From there, he went on to earn his master's degree and Ph.D. from The Ohio State University, where he wrote his dissertation on tropical meteorology. In 2006 he began his current position at Marshall University; he teaches classes in meteorology, physical geography, severe storms and natural hazards, weather analysis and climatology.

"Marshall was really receptive to me starting the program because before I came they didn't have anything," Law said. "It happens to be the first in the state, so Marshall is the only place you can go to either



Dr. Law started the meteorology program at Marshall. It is the only school in the state where one can receive a meteorology minor or a geography bachelor's with an emphasis in meteorology.

get a meteorology minor or a geography bachelor's with an emphasis in meteorology. Marshall really allowed me the freedom to start the program, and it's really taken off."

In addition to teaching, Law is also the state of West Virginia's climatologist, and the state climate office is located at Marshall. In this position, he answers people's questions regarding climate data, helps people gather and interpret data, writes reports for attorneys and even testifies in court cases where weather plays a central role.

"Last fall I testified in a child neglect case where the parent left their kid in a hot car," Law explained. "I had to testify what the conditions were like, the temperature and humidity, and what it would have been like over a period of time in that car."

Law also is the state coordinator for the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network (CoCoRaHS), a nonprofit that works to measure and map precipitation across the nation. In this role, Law wrote an article titled







Dr. Axel shows her class a “selfie” taken by a Gentoo penguin in Antarctica with a GoPro camera.



“West Virginia’s ‘Wild and Wonderful’ Climate.”

“CoCoRaHS wanted all state coordinators and climatologists to write a short summary of the weather conditions in our state,” Law said. The article can be found on CoCoRaHS’s website at www.cocorahs.org.

In the next decade, Law sees technological advances really changing the field of geography.

“As technology improves you’re going to see us focus more on the technological aspects of geography – more GIS (Geospatial Information Science), more computerized mapping – you’ll see more and more of the technical fields,” Law said. “If you think of what Google has done and what GPS has done in terms of mapping, you can have navigation wherever you go – in your car, on your phone. Geography is everywhere now.

“If you have a map on your phone – that’s geography.”

Dr. Anne Axel

*Assistant Professor, Biological Sciences
College of Science*

For most people a trip to Madagascar is no more likely than a trip to the moon. But for Dr. Anne Axel, Madagascar is a very real place never far from her mind.

Axel, a professor in the biological sciences department, has devoted her research to studying lemurs on the island off the coast of southeast Africa.

“I spent two years in graduate school at Yale then spent one year in the field in Madagascar,” Axel explained.

“What is really unique is the kind of equipment we have for this level of institution. Marshall is a great school.”

“I just really wanted to go to Madagascar. I had this idea there was something there.”

Axel did not always know, however, that this was the career path she wanted to pursue. As an undergraduate, she was pre-med and had medical school interviews her senior year.

“I was always so focused on that goal,” Axel said. “It never occurred to me that the interests I had in photography, wildlife and conservation could be woven into a job.”

Axel ultimately decided not to go to medical school and spent time working in a photography store after graduating college. All along, for no real reason, she really wanted to go to Madagascar.

“So I took my mountain bike to Madagascar,” Axel said, “and I spent about four months there. I was just photographing and meeting people. It was the turning point in my life.”

During this trip Axel decided she wanted to pursue conservation as a career, and upon returning home enrolled in Yale University’s forestry school. She spent two years in graduate school and another year in the field in Madagascar.

Axel’s specific research centers around lemurs that live on the island of Madagascar, specifically the Indri lemur, which cannot be kept in captivity. She was always interested in islands and island wildlife, and many of the species found on Madagascar – and many islands – are only found there, Axel explained.

“That was the reason I wanted to go to this country in the first place, to see these lemurs,” she said.

At the time Axel began her research in the 1990s, studies had not been done on the Indri lemur since the 1970s. She spent seven months walking the 1,000-mile island conducting her research.

“It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done,” she said. “But it was worth it.”

Axel’s goal is to make it back to Madagascar at least once a year to spend time at her field site in southern part of the country. When she is not there, the Malagasy friends (people who are native to Madagascar) she has

made through her time in the country keep watch over her equipment and field site. Axel said she tries to hire as many local people as possible to assist with aspects of her research.

Along with her research, Axel teaches an introduction to biology course for biology majors as well as a course that is cross-listed between biological science and physical science that is part of a specialized master’s program called Geobiophysical Modeling. Axel’s goal is to get more undergraduate students interested in ecology and show them that they can make a career out of the studies of ecology, conservation and wildlife. Axel came to Marshall from the University of Michigan and has really made a home here in Huntington.

“I love it here,” Axel said. “The biology department is amazing. It’s pretty unusual for someone to work abroad, but people have been so willing to help. When I have an idea the biology chair encourages me to run with it. They’ve been very supportive. It’s such a good fit for me, and I’m very happy to be here.”

Dr. Suzanne Konz

*Associate Professor of Biomechanics
College of Health Professions*

Students know Dr. Suzanne Konz as the professor who teaches them biomechanics, pathomechanics, strength and conditioning and athletic training – and Konz loves teaching. When she is not in the classroom, however, she has worked with some of the world’s most elite athletes through work with United States Track and Field, the NFL and the Olympic games.

Konz, a professor of biomechanics in the School of Kinesiology, grew up running track and cross country and playing basketball and softball. As an athlete, she was always interested in improving her personal performance, so when she went to college it was a natural fit for her to study exercise science

and become an athletic trainer. When she started her doctoral education, however, she really started pursuing biomechanics, the study of the mechanical laws relating to the movement of the human body.

“The bells started going off that this was really cool,” she said.

The field of biomechanics is constantly changing, and Konz not only teaches the subject but studies it through her personal research as well.

Konz took part in the 2012 Olympic games in Salt Lake City as an athletic trainer assigned to the bobsled, luge and skeleton. She was working at a junior college in Utah at the time and sent in a volunteer application for the games.

“The rest is history,” she said.

Konz’s Olympic volunteering had her treating some of the world’s most elite athletes from countries like Russia and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

“You work for every country that doesn’t supply the medical staff there,” Konz said. “It really comes down to the great people I worked with. Overall it was just an amazing experience.”



Dr. Konz teaches biomechanics, a field that is constantly changing.



Konz also is deeply involved with U.S. Track and Field (USTAF), where she specifically studies and works the hammer throw event. She first became involved in USTAF when her mentor, Iain Hunter, recommended her.

“He was doing the hammer throw and distance running and was part of a timing crew that helps run the timing components for meets,” she said. “He came to me one week and said, ‘I can’t go to the indoor championships because I’ve got a meet that I’ve got to help time, so you need to go.’ And I said, ‘What am I going to do?’ And he said, ‘You’re going to help with the indoor weight.’ I said, ‘Well I don’t know indoor weight, I ran distance.’ And he said, ‘Well, you’ve got two weeks to brush up!’”

Her dissertation developed from her work at USTAF and was on the difference between male and female hammer throwers.

For the past four years, Konz has been working the NFL Scouting Combine, the weeklong event where

college football players perform physical and mental tests in front of NFL coaches, general managers and scouts.

Although her work has afforded her the ability to work with Olympians and NFL players, you will not hear Konz talk about it much.

“I don’t ever want to seem like I’m bragging,” she said. “I have been very blessed.”

Konz has been at Marshall University for four years and would like to see a Ph.D. program added to the department. Konz said she frequently has students ask her why, with her resume, she would choose to work at Marshall. She always replies, “Why wouldn’t I?”

“What is really unique is the kind of equipment we have for this level of institution,” she said. “Marshall is a great school.” □

Anna Lafferre is the managing editor of the *Marshall Magazine* and a graduate student in Marshall’s School of Journalism and Mass Communications.



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