

Faculty Spotlight

Katharine (Kate) Huntington

Associate Professor, Department of Earth & Space Sciences



Kate Huntington grew up in both Pennsylvania and northern Italy, which set a perfect stage for her international research across continents. Now an assistant professor in the UW College of the Environment's Department of Earth and Space Sciences, she traverses mountains in the Himalayas of India and Nepal, western North America, and the Andes of Argentina and Chile, exploring how landscapes evolve over millions of years. She and her research group seek to understand how tectonics, erosion and climate shape Earth's surface through time, and how the evolution of Earth's surface and crust both reflect and record these interactions.

Huntington was inspired to pursue a career as a scientist and educator by her parents, and she cares deeply about inspiring the next generation of scientists. "My mother is an earth science teacher, and my father is a political science professor. Although I 'rebelled' to major in Economics in college, I came to my senses in time to get a second major in Geology, and I never looked back," Huntington says. She continues to be motivated by the steadfast example her parents set and hopes to one day see her now two-year-old son become a good field assistant and sidekick, as if it's part of his DNA. "I was doing field work in the Andes while I was five-months pregnant," says Huntington, "so I guess you could say he is well on his way!"

Huntington's current research portfolio helps paint a picture of why we see the landscapes that we do and shed light on the processes responsible. "I would like my research projects to push the limits of our ability to characterize both Earth's surface environment and the interactions of climate and landscapes through time." By examining the geochemistry of minerals in soils, lake sediments and river sands, she can tell the stories of how rivers and glaciers erode, how climate changes our landscape, and how majestic mountains and river gorges came to be.

As affirmation for the quality of Huntington's projects, the National Science Foundation, American Chemical Society Petroleum Research Fund, and Royalty Research Fund are currently helping fund major parts of her research, and she is the recipient of a National Science Foundation CAREER Award and the Geological Society of America's 2012 Donath Medal.

Besides research, the influence of her mother drives Huntington to connect outside of the university with local K-12 high school teachers, and she also works to promote opportunities for women in science. She embraces her call to academia, and is deeply focused on her goal to contribute new thoughts, ideas and approaches to science. And to get there, she will continue to "follow curiosity to pursue exciting opportunities as they come."

Photos: Courtesy of Kate Huntington

