On July 1, Susan Polster became the department head of Utah State University’s Department of Journalism and Communication (JCOM). Polster, who has been a professor at the USU Eastern campus in Price since 2010, made USU history as the first department head to be headquartered outside of Logan.

“Susan’s appointment as a USU department head is a milestone for Statewide Campuses,” said Larry Smith, vice president for Statewide Campuses. “It is reflective of both her exceptional leadership talent and the impressively seamless way USU’s academic enterprise operates as one across the state.”

Polster earned her doctorate from the University of Wyoming, her master’s from USU and bachelor’s from the University of Utah. Having seen the growth of her department since joining USU Eastern, Polster looks forward to future growth of the department as a whole across all statewide campuses.

“This act shows that Utah State is truly one university geographically dispersed,” said Greg Dart, associate vice president of USU Eastern. “We are excited for this monumental step to our full integration in the Utah State system. Dr. Polster’s commitment to journalism, to her students, and to her community is unmatched. She cares deeply about those she teaches. Our students, faculty and staff will all benefit from this selection.”

During her tenure at USU Eastern, Polster has been the faculty advisor to the university’s student newspaper, The Eagle. Under the watchful care of Polster, The Eagle has become an award-winning publication, earning awards from the Utah Press Association’s Better Newspaper Contest, as well as winning contests sponsored by the Society of Professional Journalists, Utah College Press Association, Columbia Scholastic Press Association, American Scholastic Press Association and Rocky Mountain Collegiate Media Association.

“I am honored to be in this new role and am excited for the future of the department at the university,” Polster said. “We are truly a statewide university. I love the students and love teaching and am excited that I still get to teach classes.”

In June 2021, The Eagle earned 21 awards from the Utah Press Association’s Better Newspaper Contest, including several first-place finishes. Polster also has been editor of the Utah State Eastern Alumni Magazine, an assignment she has cherished.

“I’ve gotten to interview and write articles about people who constantly amaze me,” Polster said. “People who have made a difference in the world still bring an ‘Aha moment’ to me each time I interview them. I always marvel at the success and generosity of the graduates of Carbon College, College of Eastern Utah and now Utah State University Eastern.”

During her career, Polster has also been heavily involved in promoting women in higher education. At USU Eastern, Polster has been the chair of the annual USU Eastern Women’s Conference, bringing in hundreds of people, speakers and workshops to the day-long yearly event.

Polster was also on the founding board of the Utah Women in Higher Education Network (UWHEN), which is headed by Susan Madsen, founder and director of the Utah Women & Leadership Project and the Inaugural Karen Haight Huntsman Endowed Professor of Leadership in the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business.

Her civic duties were always important to her as she was also a founding board member of the Carbon County Boys and Girls Club.

Polster has many goals for the JCOM department and has begun implementing her vision. An online JCOM degree began this fall and she hopes to build the program with more students and classes. She looks forward to bringing a four-year journalism program to all statewide campuses, expanding the department’s reach into the state and growing enrollment.
“My excitement about the department’s future is always making a difference in the lives of our students,” Polster said. “We plan to recruit, retain, engage and prepare our students for the constantly changing JCOM jobs of tomorrow. Added to this is the department’s strategy of bringing more diversity and inclusion into our enrollments. I always quote Stephen R. Covey’s ‘Strength lies in differences, not in similarities’ when I talk about increasing creativity, higher innovation and better decision making. I hope this makes a wiser, more inclusive and better department for USU.”

As a journalism professor, Polster prides herself in growing journalism students with a solid ethical core which includes fairness, objectivity and honesty. She seeks to instill qualities such as tech-savviness, communication skills and analytical minds. Above all, she hopes her students never stop questioning or learning.

“One of the questions I always tell my students to ask an interviewee is ‘what is a note they would tell their younger self?’” she said. “If someone asked me what my note to my younger self would be, it would be to enjoy the moment, treat life as an adventure and never stop learning.”

For more information on USU’s Journalism and Communications department, visit journalism.usu.edu.

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