COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

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DROUGHT EDUCATION INTERNSHIP
LARIMER COUNTY

PROJECT INTRODUCTION:

Colorado Drought Advisors is a network of professionals across the state who are committed to supporting Colorado agricultural producers by educating and assisting them with drought preparation and response strategies. This internship helped solve three problems for Colorado Drought Advisors:

The Colorado Drought Advisors Website (droughtadvisors.org) needed improvement regarding its accessibility, design, and some of its content.

The existing Drought Handbook (Colorado Drought Advisors' primary guide and resource for educating agricultural producers about drought preparedness strategies) was inaccessible, outdated, and needed significant revision.

Some Drought Advisors struggled with low attendance at drought workshops in their counties, so the team requested guidance and resources for outreach and marketing materials and strategies.

INTERNSHIP GOALS:

This internship had three primary goals:

First, to significantly edit the website so it meets accessibility standards, while also improving its design and updating its content.

Second, to update, design, and improve the accessibility of the Drought Handbook.

Third, to create materials and develop strategies to aid Drought Advisors outreach and marketing efforts and increase enrollment in drought workshops.

APPLICATION TO MY EDUCATION:

As a Master of Communications and Media Management student, this internship has been an incredibly valuable experience.

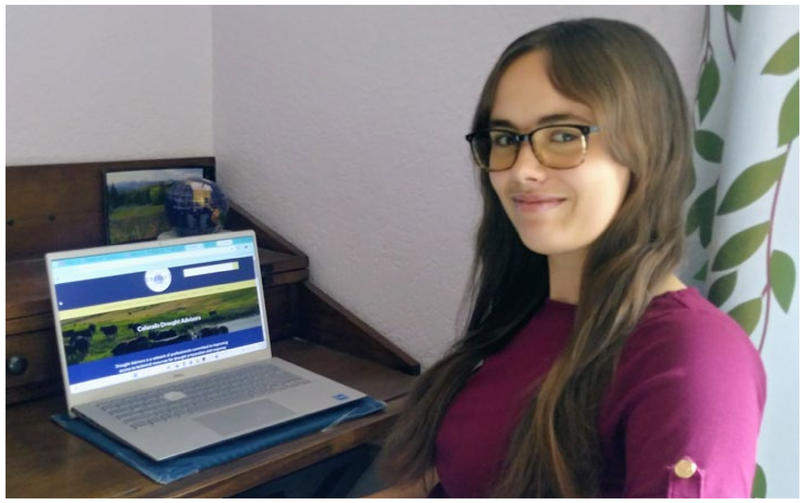
In addition to further developing my skillsets in website development, graphic design, research, marketing, and strategic communications, this internship has provided me with extensive accessibility education and hands-on experience.

Further, I've expanded my professional network and met so many incredible mentors, who have taught me about their careers.

WHAT I DID:

For the Drought Education Internship, I conducted a thorough audit of the website, which included evaluating it with a screen reader and keyboard navigation, checking every color for sufficient color contrast, referencing alternative text for images, investigating heading levels, and noting inaccessible features. I completed online trainings and conducted informational interviews with experts to further develop my knowledge about web accessibility and development. I led two Colorado Drought Advisors meetings and facilitated discussions about the website's color palette, logo, and more. I thoroughly edited the website, so it now meets accessibility standards and has an improved design.

Figure 1. Emma Cailene (Intern) edits the Colorado Drought Advisors website for accessibility.



While creating the new edition of the Drought Handbook, I transferred and redesigned more than a hundred pages of content in Venngage. In order to make the Drought Handbook accessible, I adapted complex charts, tables, and images by developing accessible versions in Venngage, in addition to adding alternative text and captions.

Before developing outreach and marketing materials and strategies, I conducted research by interviewing Drought Advisors both individually and collectively at their meetings. This expanded my understanding of their current communications methods and the characteristics of their specific target audiences among Colorado agricultural producers. Based on this knowledge, I created the following materials: an email template, five flyer templates, social media templates, a recommended social media timeline, suggested messaging, a slide deck template, an agenda template, and recommended standardized questions for workshop registration.

WHAT I LEARNED:

This internship taught me so much about accessibility, which has also transformed my perspective. Now, I create communications materials with accessibility as a priority, considering which color combinations, fonts, heading structures, and other features will improve the user's experience.

My discussions and research with the Drought Advisors have expanded my view about modern communication. Some target audiences (like the large-scale crop producers of Dolores County) are best engaged via traditional methods, such as word-of-mouth, snail mail, phone calls, and physical flyers.

Figure 2. Emma Cailene (Intern, right) meets remotely with Retta Bruegger (Mentor, left) to discuss progress.

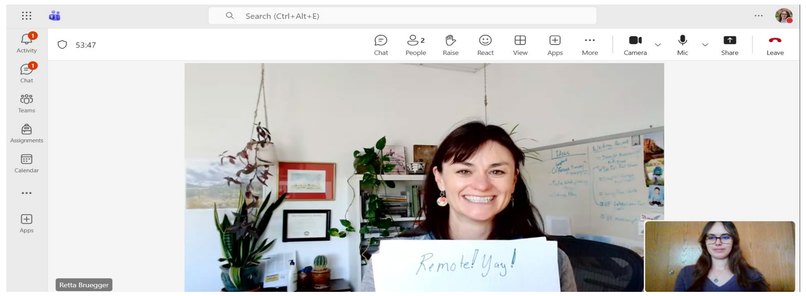


Figure 3. Screenshots of the Colorado Drought Advisors website (left) and the Drought Handbook (right) after edits.



NEXT STEPS:

The Colorado Drought Advisors website edits have been published.

After a final review, the Drought Handbook will be published on the Colorado Drought Advisors website as a resource for agricultural producers.

The Colorado Drought Advisors marketing materials are ready for use.