Agricultural communication and journalism students gain national recognition at the Ag Media Summit for their media and leadership skills.

The summit is the largest meeting for communication professionals in the country. Students attend to participate in professionally taught workshops, gain experience outside of the class room and network for internship and scholarship opportunities. The 2015 Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow Critique Contest had 380 entries in 10 categories.

Utah State University is one of the youngest agricultural communication and journalism programs in the nation, yet three of USU's students walked away with a national award in hand for their submissions.

"When you want to create a good product, you have to put extra time into it. Maybe more time than other students, but it definitely pays off," said Jamie Keyes, a senior in agricultural communications and journalism.

Keyes, along with seniors Paige Marez and Cassidy Woosley, submitted agriculturally-related articles, videos and photos into the nationwide contests. Results were announced at Ag Media Summit in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Keyes won multiple awards over the past two years, including the National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow award, the Livestock Publication Council Forrest Bassford Award travel scholarship and the Herdmark Media Agriculture video award.

The Forest Bassford Award is the most prestigious award given to students by the Livestock Publications Council.

Keyes submitted a documentary about her family's ranch in Monticello, Utah to win the video contest.

Woosley, an agriculture communications and journalism major, took second place in the long feature story division in the 2015 ACT Critique Contest at the summit. Her submission featured three different beef producers that utilize cloning technology on their operation and the experiences they have had with it.

Marez, also an agricultural communication and journalism major, placed second and received an honorable mention for her images in the #CaptureAgriculture photo and video contest, hosted by Herdmark.

"Agricultural communication students have a love for agriculture," Keyes said. "It is what makes assignments fun and makes them want to work hard and accomplish things."

Agricultural communication and journalism assistant professor Dr. Kelsey Hall said membership and involvement in the Agricultural Communications club is key to success. It is the only way to even attend the summit and enter the critique contest.

"Our adviser, Dr. Kelsey Hall, is always looking for ways for us to improve, and the ACT Critique Contest is a great chance for us to compete against some of the best," Woosley said. "It is also a great way to learn because this contest provides you with useful feedback from industry professionals."

Woosley spent the past summer at an internship with the Progressive Cattleman magazine in Jerome, Idaho. She wrote various articles covering news, feature stories, industry topics and more. She said the internships pay off.

"Going to school is just the first step. It is also just as important to go out and apply that knowledge in a real-world scenario," she said. "All these things are huge resume-builders. Get involved and don't be afraid to apply for things, whether it's a contest or an internship — you just never know what will happen. It might just be what gets you a job later on."

John L. Hawley represented USU as the first ever ACT national officer. Hawley was elected secretary/treasurer for the National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow. He is working on a Master of Science in Agricultural Extension and Education at USU. His major responsibility is to raise sponsorship funds for the professional development conference, the summit and Farm Broadcasters convention.
“I hope to gain a multitude of valuable experiences from my time as an NACT officer,” Hawley said. “I believe that my year of service will leave me well-rounded and prepared to work closely with partners in the agricultural industry.”

Hall said the USU Agricultural communication program is proud to have Hawley serve as a role model for students and believes his experience can benefit them in positive ways.

“Hard work and grasping opportunities always pays off, even if it’s scary sometimes,” Keyes said.

— elizabeth.dalton@aggiemail.usu.edu