Two diversely talented and versatile students have been named Media Scholars by Utah State University’s Department of Journalism and Communication. Melanie Christensen and Kelsey Adams are the second and third students to receive the designation, which was created to honor exemplary student engagement, encourage professional development, and broaden experiences across the university’s curriculum.

“What happens within the confines of our department’s curriculum is a great foundation for any student who wishes to be a professional communicator,” said assistant professor Matthew LaPlante, who facilitates the program. “But our media scholars recognize that a foundation is only valuable when you build something on it, and they really take advantage of the vast opportunities Aggies are offered when they are students here at Utah State.”

The Media Scholars program is offered to any student in the department or its affiliated programs.

Students earn points toward the scholar designation through a variety of curricular and extracurricular accomplishments.

Christensen, a major emphasizing in print journalism, is the former managing editor of the department’s literary journalism magazine, Blueprint, which is advised by Professor Cathy Bullock.

“Editing is my passion, and I loved editing alongside Cathy Bullock and watching her process of not only critically editing words and phrases, but also facts and logic,” Christensen said. “Even though the Blueprint was established a few years earlier, I felt like I was doing everything from scratch to keep it alive. If I ever want to start a magazine of my own, now I know exactly how much hard work goes into it.”

Christensen took several recommended-but-not-required courses outside of the journalism department to broaden her writing skills. She attended multiple journalism conferences, and served as a tutor and undergraduate teaching fellow. She also interned at Utah Public Radio, and wrote for Cache Magazine and Utah State’s student newspaper, The Statesman.

Adams, a major emphasizing in public relations, made an exceptional effort to enroll in journalism classes that weren’t required for her degree, studying crisis reporting, social media, multimedia and feature writing.

She put the skills she learned in those classes to work in an internship at KUTV, multiple internships with The Deseret News, where she honed her craft as a writer and editor, and an internship at Deseret Digital Media, where she helped run social media for The Mormon Times.

“Our audience was primarily members of the LDS church, which required a certain online tone and presence,” Adams said. “Because it was so different from my other internships with the Deseret News, this internship taught me how to create a voice and write to a specific audience.”

Adams also served as co-president of the USU PR Club, worked as a tutor for other journalism students, and contributed to College of Humanities and Social Science’s magazine, Liberalis.

“The experiences these students have packed into their careers at Utah State have really set a gold standard for what it means to get the most out of your education,” LaPlante said. “The result of that incredible effort is that either of these two young women could immediately step into a job in a wide range of media industries.”

About a dozen students have enrolled in the Media Scholars program and are working toward the designation. The department’s first media scholar, Melissa Allison, is now a reporter for KPCW public radio in Park City.