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Tuesday, 30 Apr

## Q & A – Laura A. Biggs

Posted on April 29, 2019 (<https://mbjguam.com/2019/04/29/q-a-laura-a-biggs/>) by [web master \(https://mbjguam.com/author/web-master/\)](https://mbjguam.com/author/web-master/) | [Leave a comment \(https://mbjguam.com/2019/04/29/q-a-laura-a-biggs/#respond\)](https://mbjguam.com/2019/04/29/q-a-laura-a-biggs/#respond)



Biggs

*Editor's note: Laura A. Biggs is an assistant professor of biology in the College of Natural and Applied Sciences at the University of Guam.*

*She previously worked as a lab technician at the New York Medical College, an enrichment coordinator for the Let's Do Science Program for the Olivera Lab at the University of Utah and a consultant for the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education Professional Development Workshops in the Professional and International Programs at the University of Guam. She became an assistant professor at UOG in 2009.*

*Biggs is president of the American Association of University Women. She was awarded the 2008 Wolf Prize, which recognizes and rewards excellent teaching by a PhD student graduating from any department in the*

*College of Pharmacy at the University of Guam who has demonstrated interest in teaching, and sought new teaching opportunities throughout their PhD career, and the 2010 Manfayi International Peace Award, which recognizes an individual who demonstrates commitment and leadership within the community on Guam.*

*Biggs holds a 2003 bachelor's in biology with a minor in education from Manhattanville Collage in New York and a 2009 doctorate in philosophy from the University of Utah.*

### Q: While managing millions of dollars in grant awards, what have you found to be unique to working with the government and business entities on Guam to successfully carry out the objectives of the grant?

A: In my experience, it's all about personal relationships — making authentic personal connections with people and having shared goals is what gets things done on Guam. A lack of caring about the people you work with leaves a key component of the community out of the work we do here. We can stay focused on getting the job done, while still having meaningful connections. My father in law imparted a sense of empathy in me that I am grateful for and helps me in my work and to resolve conflicts.

### Q: What is the importance of maintaining environmentally responsible businesses, specifically on Guam?

A: Our environment is our major asset for the island. We don't have a choice, if we don't put the environment first, we'll be the island that used to have beautiful coral reefs. Everything we do on land impacts our off-shore environments. Trying to stay solely focused on financial profit is short sighted and puts our island economy at risk for our future.

### Q: What is the biggest issue that Guam faces when it comes to sustainable resources?

A: We consume so much and in many cases, we aren't taking opportunities to reduce. The three R's of sustainability have been around for a while, but when was the last time you thought about simply reducing your consumption? What do we need to be sustainable and fulfilled as a community? Are ten party favors for a birthday really necessary? Where are those products coming from?

If we are choosing to focus on the recycling component, we need to make recycling second nature for everyone. At every party, funeral, rosary ... we should be recycling. Its not the job of one individual in the family, we have to hold each other accountable. Recycling aluminum at the public schools can bring much needed revenue. The tides are changing and our consumers are smart — they want to commit to companies that value Guam and all it has to offer. Being committed to our environment and reducing waste can be a tenant of any business on Guam.

### Q: What are the three most significant actions that businesses can take to begin a more environmentally responsible practice?

1. Implement a sustainable bottom line. What is best for the long-term sustainability of our island?
2. Go above what's required. If you're going through life just barely meeting the requirements, in the academic setting that results in average grades. What can make a business stand out sustainably and go beyond what current laws or practices demand? Be the leader of change in our community.
3. A little more in the weeds on this one, but for the love of all our ocean and near shore resources, we need to stop using so much plastic. Stop using Styrofoam. How many Styrofoam containers do we put into the waste stream — are there alternatives? The answer is yes. Could our leftovers be stored in tin foil alone? As businesses, can you have alternative take out containers? For the consumer, ask your server to pack appropriate leftovers in foil only. We need to rethink Styrofoam packaging, straws and plastic bags. We don't need them, they end up on our beaches, roads, streams and jungles. If we don't consume them, then we truly have control.

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**Q: What are the biggest long-term opportunities for sustainable resources for businesses on Guam?**

**A:** We have a plethora of natural resources that could be used for the production of sustainable products: bamboo, banana leaves, coconut husks, etc.

**Q: How is working with the government different on Guam, with such a high and growing military presence?**

**A:** I just think being an empathetic individual is the best practice. We don't always agree, but moving forward in a respectful way values both sides.

**Q: Why have you chosen to be a part of the American Association of University Women?**

**A:** I was fortunate to have many female professional mentors along the way — my PhD is the result of me seeing other women in STEM fields, but this isn't the case for everyone. I feel an obligation to share that it is entirely possible to succeed as a woman in STEM fields. Young women and girls get more easily discouraged when encountering adversity and helping our next generation realize that math and science is hard is an important part of their success. It's hard for men and boys too; it's not because they're female that they won't succeed — only when we give up do we fail. Women of Pacific Islander descent are a minority in the STEM fields and the culture necessitates that our young women and girls know they are capable and offer even more than the majority to broadening our STEM fields. I'm not Pacific Islander, but I'm a determined woman who failed and fought to achieve, and this perseverance is something we share. I wanted to be able to continue my involvement with advancing young women and girls outside of the University.

**Q: Why is the AAUW specifically important for women and girls in the science field nationally, but also specifically on Guam?**

**A:** Our young women and girls need positive role models. Providing programs and supporting the young women and girls in our community sets up a community of growth and positive influence. AAUW is a diverse group of professionals that serve to stay in touch with our community and fulfill needs. Many of our members are at the Guam Community College or the University of Guam and we have opportunities to extend our reach to these students. **mbj**

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