The concept for this project grew out of my frustration in hearing political figures and celebrities spread misinformation that was widely accepted by the public as fact, especially about scientific issues. Having some experience in graphic design, I wanted to create infographics directly relating to these mistruths, showing an objective point of view based in fact and research. My overall goal was to provide a resource that was unbiased and easily understood that could quickly correct misperceptions spread by prominent figures. I wanted to fill the gap left by subscription news sources and biased reporting, consolidating multiple facets of an issue into a visual appealing graphic. My target audience was young adults, which was chosen due to both my own experiences and the fact that this population most frequently accesses the news through social media. When I found out that a social media manager was needed for stemosphere, the Latham social media page on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, I found the perfect opportunity to integrate my original vision with the overall administration of a science-based social media page. Thus, another one of my goals became increasing engagement in the stemosphere pages by crafting exciting, relevant, and informative content.

In order to implement this project, I first needed to establish partners with experience in social media management; I knew my experience as a simple user of these platforms would not be sufficient for the scope of this project. I connected with Jess Smith, Communications Coordinator for the University of Iowa Pentacrest Museums. She gave me tips for high-quality photography and editing tools. She also talked about some of the larger concepts of generating content, establishing online partners, and advertising for events. I also sat down with Emily Ward, Social Media Manager for the Magid Center and the Iowa Review. She showed me how to use the scheduling tools page on Facebook, TweetDeck for Twitter, and Hootsuite for Instagram. This allowed me to plan out my posts ahead of time and schedule them for the day/time that I wanted them posted.

My plans for this project shifted throughout the year of planning and implementation. Originally, I had planned on creating one infographic every 2-3 weeks. However, I quickly realized that I could not achieve my desired depth for each infographic while also managing the stemosphere pages. I then modified my plans to post one infographic per month – February, March, and April – choosing to focus more on the regular content for stemosphere. These goals were reformatted once again due to the shift to online classes. Having already completed my March infographic, I opted to only complete one other infographic due to the increased demands of assisting my classmates in advertising their projects online.
Figure 1 shows the general schedule that I used to keep track of posts. The posts generally fell into four groups: events, blog posts, people, and Latham projects. For the events, I would share or create the event on Facebook and post about them on Instagram and Twitter. The blog posts were advertisements for “Species Spotlights”, a blog created by a Latham Fellow to highlight endangered species and biodiversity. The people category consisted of spotlight posts highlighting information about Latham Fellows in the 2019-20 cohort. Finally, the projects category consisted of any elements that were a part of a current Latham project, including my infographics, which are shown in Figure 2 on the following page.

My process for content creation typically involved searching other University of Iowa pages for content that I could promote and share, such as Iowa Biology or ICRU. I also based some of my posts on the time of year or holidays, like featuring prominent black scientists for Black History Month.

The most work went into the creation of infographics. Often, the content I wanted to include was far too much for a single infographic, so I had to spend time sketching out my layout and choosing specific points to be the focus. I also conducted thorough research to ensure that the information was accurate and comprehensive.

The impact of this project could be easily measured via digital metrics. The page likes on Facebook increased by 16 likes throughout the spring semester, and overall engagement on posts depended heavily on the type of post and whether or not it had been shared. For example, the fellow spotlights, which were commonly shared by other UIowa pages and by the fellows themselves on Facebook, had an average of 4.5 times more reach than other posts on the stemosphere Facebook page. With 76 followers on Instagram, each post received an average of 6.6 likes. In the future, these numbers could be improved by maintaining year-round engagement instead of letting the page going dark until the next Latham Fellow picks it up again.

Encouraging all fellows in the program to like, follow, and share stemosphere posts is also a vital way to generate more views from a wider audience. One of the biggest things that I learned through this project is that it takes an incredible amount of work and dedication to grow one’s audience on social media. Posts must be consistent, entertaining, and relevant. In addition, people are more likely to follow and like pages/posts where they feel that they can engage and get a response. Although my scheduling strategy worked well for getting content out there, the posts could have been more successful had I spent additional time following new pages, messaging other institutions, and using comments to foster a sense of community.
Figure 2: Infographics created as part of this project, which can be viewed in full interactive form at the following links
Clean Water Act: https://my.visme.co/projects/g7zv44z0-clean-water-act-infographic
Dairy Industry: https://my.visme.co/view/kkxnmmy7-dairy-industry-infographic