

The AMS Board for Early Career Professionals wants to highlight members of the weather, water and climate enterprise who exemplifies the AMS Mission just a few years into their career. Our “Perspectives from Early Career Professionals” segment aims to highlight early career achievements in multiple sectors of meteorology, including academic, government, private and broadcast.

This segment features Dr. Victor Gensini, professor for the Meteorology Department at the College of DuPage in Illinois. He received his BS and MS from Northern Illinois University, and then moved on to the University of Georgia to work for his PhD. His dissertation is titled “Hazardous Convective Weather in the U.S.: A Dynamical Downscaling Approach” and has authored over 10 journal articles in just a few short years. One of those articles includes promising research to forecast tornadoes weeks in advance, which has gained a lot of attention in the atmospheric community.

BECP: How important were internships early on to get to where you are today?

VG: Several semesters of volunteering at local NWS offices were an integral part of expanding my professional network. 2007 was a turning point in my career. That summer, I participated in the CAPS/OU Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) at the National Weather Center in Norman, OK. I credit that summer with sharpening my interests and building the necessary confidence to pursue a teaching/research career in academia.

BECP: What made you decide to go for your PhD instead applying for jobs after you received your B.S.?

VG: I wanted to apply for a government position after graduation, but jobs were relatively scarce then and I was not able to obtain a SCEP internship as a pathway into the NWS. The choice to pursue a Ph.D. was mostly driven by my M.S. thesis advisor. He had the confidence that I would be successful as a doctoral student. I fell in love with UGA (Athens, GA) on my first visit and never looked back. It was the best decision I have ever made.

BECP: What was the most difficult part of the job search process for you?

VG: Finding job postings! Yes, many jobs are posted on listservs, job boards, and social media...but there are also jobs open that you will only hear about through the “grapevine” or if you are actively pursuing a position at a specific institution/company. Use your professional network to the best of your ability during the job search process.

BECP: Do you have any helpful tips for someone going through the job search right now?

VG: Be persistent! The job search process in academia can be a grueling process. Also, pick up a copy of “Tomorrow’s Professor” by Richard Reis. I believe it should be a must read for anyone preparing to enter an academic career in Atmospheric Science. If/when you get an interview, be creative in your presentation. Be honest about your strengths and weaknesses, and most importantly, be yourself!

BECP: What is it like to be an early career professional and work in the academic sector?

VG: It’s interesting, mainly because early career professionals in the academic sector do not have tenure. During the non-tenure phase, you are constantly juggling teaching, research, advising, and service to the institution. Receiving tenure was one of the highlights in my early career.

BECP: In the academic community, there is a popular phrase: “Publish or Perish.” What are your thoughts on this?

VG: It’s true, but not at all institutions. Certainly, if you’ve been hired to strictly perform research at an R1 institution, then there is going to be expectations that you will contribute to peer reviewed literature. Everyone will have a different path/story, and there is no “one size fits all” model for academia. I am thankful that my mentors pushed me to publish my work during graduate school, which has greatly helped in the quality/number of articles I have been involved with post-graduation.

BECP: What is something unique you’ve been able to accomplish/experience so far in your career?

VG: Appearing on The Weather Channel’s “WxGeeks” was a unique experience for me. I was probably the youngest guest they have ever had on the show. When our (Al Marinaro and I) research broke, it was incredible to see our work going across the bottom of the Fox News ticker. A surreal moment...

BECP: To reach this point in your career, what role have mentors and advisors played?

VG: Mentors are absolutely crucial to the success of undergraduate/graduate students. I owe all of my success to my advisors in graduate school (Drs. Walker Ashley [NIU] and Thomas Mote [UGA]). Mentors such as Drs. David Changnon and J. Marshall Shepherd always challenged me to think in new ways. I am forever grateful to these folks, and several others that have helped me along the way. I hope to provide the same sort of guidance and support they gave me to my students in the future.

BECP: Whom do you admire in our profession? Why do you feel that way?

VG: Great question. Outside of my mentors, I’d have to say that I have a lot of respect for Drs. Harold Brooks and Chuck Doswell. Harold mentored me during the summer of 2007 at NSSL and Chuck is never afraid to speak his mind in good conversation. I consider them to be giants in the field of severe storms meteorology. I also deeply admire Dr. Roger Wakimoto, even though we have never met. Roger’s presentations at conferences always have me on the edge of my seat.

BECP: How do you feel the field has changed? Where do you think it’s going?

VG: There is no question in my mind that we are moving away from traditional “forecasting” careers and into a stage of “big data analytics.” Graduates that are able to capitalize on computer programming are going to be a more valuable asset to the larger workforce, even if the job is not directly in the atmospheric science field. I know of many successful meteorology graduates that are doing great things in “fringe” fields of GIS, computer science, and geography. There will always be a niche need for forecasters, but the age of model diagnostics, data visualization, and communication/decision making is here to stay.

BECP: What advice would you give to an early career professional starting in this field?

VG: Atmospheric Science is an incredibly rewarding field. There are facts waiting to be discovered every day. You will truly get out what you put in across the board in this field. It may be a relatively small family in some branches, but there are great people out there waiting to be your colleague. Work hard. Work smart. Most of all, be creative. Don’t be afraid to take risks and try new things that may initially give you hesitation. Go to conferences! AMS meetings are great places to network. When there, introduce yourself to people and make the most out of your experience. Finally, do not forget why you

love this field. Sit down occasionally and examine RADAR, satellite, or weather maps. Most in this field are just big weather geeks doing what we love to do. I know I am.

