

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.

To celebrate the 2017 winner of the AMS Award for Early Career Achievement, this segment features our inaugural recipient, Dr. Ankur Desai, professor of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has been with the university for 10 years, and is a staple in the community. He publishes research papers that advance climate science, teaches several undergraduate and graduate classes, conducts outreach to his local community, and provides service to support the department, university, and discipline. In 2015, he was the clear winner of the AMS Award for Early Career Achievement, and received his award at the 96th Annual Meeting in New Orleans, LA.

BECP: What path did you take to get to the position you are currently in today?

AK: Some aspects of my path were quite linear, others were unexpected. Sometimes, it was about being in the right place at the right time and other times, it was planned and methodical. Having a supportive advisor and a willingness to explore multiple avenues and not being afraid to reach out to find mentors helped. I was fortunate to have taken a great workshop on academic careers, which gave me the tools and confidence to apply and interview for this position, for which I would otherwise have not done.

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

AK: I'm quite jealous of the opportunities undergraduates can find today to intern in labs, industry, and public sector. However, the experiences I did have, mostly after undergraduate, were as helpful in telling me what I didn't like to do as discovering what I found rewarding. Working before graduate school and between my master's and Ph.D. helped clarify to me what I wanted to get out of my graduate degrees and also forced me to treat graduate school more like a job, with expectations of regular work hours, goal setting, and professional networking from the outset.

BECP: When applying to your first (or subsequent) job, what was the interview process like?

AK: Certainly, academic jobs have their own culture, especially when it comes to interviewing. I found that if I treated them like extended seminar speaker visits, with the primarily goal of finding new collaborations, along with enjoying better than average food, I had a better time and I came off less nervous.

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

AK: I'm not good at narrowing down the search to the best positions. There are so many exciting opportunities out there and I get lost thinking about too many possible futures instead of focusing on the most viable options. I also used to be relatively introverted, so it took a bit of courage for me to pick up the phone (or e-mail) and chat with folks doing the hiring. But whenever I have done it, it was never the wrong thing to do.

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

AK: Do not get discouraged by the stories you hear, the number of applicants, or your perceived lack of proper qualifications. Yes, it's a long road, the best people don't always get the job, and

race/gender/age/economic bias and privilege are very real. But the outlook for meteorology professionals is very good and very few of our graduates will not land on their feet somewhere. Get feedback from trusted friends and mentors on your job application. Work your network to find opportunities and make introductions. Go to conferences like AMS with a resume in hand. Have a website that highlights your best work. For academic careers, publish your dissertation chapters as soon as you can. Re-examine your own judgements about places you wouldn't go or jobs you wouldn't do. In our field, mobility is essential.

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

AK: I am trained in safety/rescue for climbing radio towers, since we operate several, ranging in height from 30 feet to 1300 feet, that my lab uses to conduct lower atmosphere turbulent flux measurements.

BECP: Is there anything you would have done differently in college knowing what you know now about your job?

AK: I would have sought out more undergraduate research opportunities with professors at my college or elsewhere (through, for example, NSF's REU program). I would have taken more math, especially statistics.

BECP: Who do you seek out for advice and why? To whom do you routinely provide advice, if anyone?

AK: These days, I seek advice mainly from my peers in similar academic research careers. Swapping stories and sharing tips with each other, on everything from course modules to research proposals to family work-life balance, has been incredibly valuable. As the chair of our graduate program, I find myself providing practical and personal advice to graduate students. While this can be time consuming, I also find this highly rewarding, watching students grow into scholars, and especially in cases where students didn't see themselves in those positions at the start.

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

AK: I admire some of our best communicators, such as Marshall Shepherd at U. Georgia, Katharine Hayhoe at Texas Tech, Jon Foley at the California Academy of Sciences, and others who are in the front lines of climate science, tackling the role of public outreach in their own ways. I aspire to be as effective as they are in my own communication. It's a real challenge in our discipline to explain how the work we do is trustworthy and at the base to the decisions made by society about the risks of climate change and weather extremes.

BECP: What do you want to be doing in 5 years? Why?

AK: In five years, I will have three teenage daughters. I should hope to survive that! My oldest daughter will be one year out of high school, which is absolutely mind blowing to me. More than anything, I still want to be a supportive and good father and husband, and that my kids discover their passions and talents in a safe and supportive environment. I hope to stay an active researcher, finding a good balance between cutting edge research and community engagement.

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

AK: Field always change. Ones that don't are dying. It's an observation rich era, and skills to analyze large

data sets, and understand the fundamentals that go into a good measurement of the atmosphere will be in demand. Integration of social science aspects of our field, in economic forecasting, business operations, human factors, and risk management will be key in making our science more useful to society.

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

AK: You are not alone! There are a lot of people in the same boat, dealing with the same problems, the same absolutely annoying people, and the same student dilemmas. Survivor's syndrome and imposter syndrome are real, but can be overcome. Seek supportive people out, whether through early career groups like AMS BECP, local mentoring groups, social media and listservs, or elsewhere.

