

The AMS Board for Early Career Professionals wants to highlight members of the weather, water and climate enterprise who exemplify 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.

This month’s segment highlights Elyse Hagner, a Meteorologist working at National Weather Service Headquarters. Read the interview to learn more about what she does, the career path that she’s taken over the last several years, and her tips on mentoring and leadership!

BECP: Where do you currently work and what path did you take to get to the position you are currently in today?

Elyse: I work for the Office of Organizational Excellence at National Weather Service Headquarters. Our office focuses on strategic planning, organizational health and culture, partnerships, and governance for the NWS. I started my NWS career while in college as a SCEP (the predecessor to today’s Pathways program) at NWS State College. I was hired full time after college and worked as a met intern then forecaster at the weather forecast offices in State College, PA and Morristown, TN before moving to NWS Headquarters in January.

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

Elyse: I wouldn’t be where I am today without my college internships! I started out as a student volunteer at NWS Pittsburgh and then as a SCEP at NWS State College. The experience and knowledge I gained during both internships primed me for an entry level position with the NWS. Additionally, the relationships I built with individuals in the agency (both supervisors and peers!) continues to serve me to this day.

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

Elyse: Mentors are so important! Despite increasing numbers of females being hired into the NWS, it is still male-dominated. As such, I found myself as the only female meteorologist at my office when I started my career. Having a female in management serve as a mentor was extremely helpful and helped me not feel like I was on an island. I also find it helpful to have mentors that can serve as a reality check or hold me accountable for my own goals. I rely on them for honest feedback and a different perspective.

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

Elyse: As technology continues to increase at an exponential rate, the field is going to continue to rapidly change. It’s highly likely that your job description today is not what you will be doing for the rest of your career. Be open and adaptable to change.

BECP: What recommendations would you give young professionals to avoid becoming overwhelmed or burnt out?

Elyse: Prioritize and learn when and how to say no! If you have too much on your plate, it’s really easy to feel overwhelmed and stretched thin. Plus, if you’re constantly scrambling to get things done, it’s likely you’re not doing your best work. Step back and figure out what’s most important - that’s what you should be focusing your time and energy on. You also need to make sure you give yourself time to relax and disconnect from work. Don’t fall into a trap of being connected 24/7 - sure there are some things you may have to deal with immediately when they come up, but leave everything else

for when you're in the office.

BECP: Do you have any tips for those interested in leadership or mentorship?

Elyse: It's never too early to start mentoring! If you're in the first few years of your career, you may think you don't have enough experience to be a mentor when you actually are the perfect mentor for a college student a few years behind you because your memories and experiences are still fresh! Serve as a mentor for an student in your office or connect with students through a college alumni network. If you're interested in leadership, look for opportunities to get involved with a professional organization like AMS at either a local or national level. Or, find other unique leadership opportunities with a volunteer organization, your local homeowners association, or anything else you're passionate about.

BECP: What are some challenges you have experienced as an early career professional?

Elyse: My current role is vastly different than my previous experience -- I went from being an operational forecaster to focusing on organizational health & culture and strategic planning. It was a challenge to shift from such a tactical role to looking at the bigger picture. I am fortunate to have great support from my colleagues not only within my own office but across headquarters!

I also had to be open to the idea of moving around the country in order to progress my career. With a limited amount of positions at each weather forecast office, it's common for NWS employees to move in order to reach the next step in their career. I ended up moving twice in just over a year and a half which was tough not only for me but also for my husband who had to find a new job every time we moved.

BECP: What other things are important to you that you make time for, aside from work and family?

Elyse: Physical and mental health are extremely important! As a rotating shift worker, I really struggled with getting enough sleep, especially when I was on overnight shifts. I found that I slept much better if I made a point to get some kind of physical activity in - even if it was only a walk with the dog. Additionally, forecasting can be high stress - especially if you find yourself in a string of busy weather days or gearing up for a major event! Despite how busy I may be, I find it helpful to carve out some time to unwind and do something calming and technology free like reading or gardening.

