

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 Christina Crowe, Master Instructor at the National Weather Service Leadership Academy. Read on to learn about her path within the NWS and insightful advice on being an early career professional in the government sector.

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

Christina: I have been a Master Instructor at the NWS Leadership Academy for a little over a year. I started out full time as an operational forecaster in southern Missouri and in northern Alabama and loved working with our emergency management partners to prepare for and respond to winter storms, tornado outbreaks, and flooding events. Nearly five years ago I took a step away from operations so I could learn more about how organizations work and get things done at the headquarters level. I was lucky enough to get to learn from some amazing leaders at both NWS and NOAA headquarters for two years, getting a crash course in budgets and big picture thinking! After I finished my rotational assignment, I got to do some really cool work on organizational culture and then spent nine months managing congressional interaction for the NOAA Satellites office. Since arriving at the Leadership Academy, I have been helping develop and facilitate training for our newest employees and for leaders at all levels of the NWS.

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

Christina: Internships were HUGE important to get where I am because they helped me learn what jobs were really like and explore opportunities or experiences I hadn’t thought possible. My very first internship in the NWS was at the Meteorological Development Lab’s Verification Branch at NWS Headquarters and it was a lot of background coding work. It was great because I got to see what it was like to work at headquarters, I realized I liked solving coding puzzles that helped make other people’s jobs easier, and I discovered I really wanted to get field experience. When selecting a location for my NOAA Hollings internship I then knew I wanted to work at a field office so I could experience that environment, even though everyone was telling me to go to a national center or lab when I had the chance. It ended up being the perfect experience I needed, though, to know I wanted to be a front line forecaster.

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

Christina: The rotational assignment I did at NOAA headquarters was one of the toughest and best experiences of my career so far. I loved getting the new perspective beyond my own office and the opportunities that are out there to collaborate and do great things. That included getting to visit the UK Met Office. Getting to see how their operations have changed over the years and the different challenges they face or benefits they experience because of their business model was fascinating.

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

Christina: I wish I’d taken the time and expanded my coursework beyond meteorology since so much of the work we do is cross-disciplinary. Classes in education, public administration, or emergency management would’ve been / would be extremely helpful in my career and it’s so much harder to go back for more schooling after you’ve started working full time. I started a second masters in education after being out of grad school for only a few years and it was also harder to

back into that classroom mode!

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

Christina: Being in the government sector can be tough but I really enjoy it because it's my way of serving the larger community. The two biggest things I've struggled with are 1) not getting frustrated with the pace of change and 2) not getting too focused on one 'right' career path.

What's helping me with the 1st: Someone explained to me recently that government was DESIGNED to be slow changing because it's designed to last through all sorts of changing views/needs so the slow helps prevent whiplash and hopefully only lets the good things through. Once you embrace that, it's quite a bit easier to embrace the patience government work requires.

What's helping me with the 2nd: I loved being an operational forecaster, helping our partners keep communities safe. But I love helping others do that job well and I love being able to look at bigger picture perspectives beyond one forecast area. It's REALLY hard to think about not using all the meteorological skills you spend years on getting degrees...but realizing there's more than one way to contribute to the mission opens me up to possibilities that are out there or don't even exist yet. We need folks with all sorts of skills and views to be successful.

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

Christina: Make time for yourself.

I always rolled my eyes at folks when they'd tell me this as I first started out because I thought - that's easy for you to say, I have to go 'all out' so I can make a name for myself and get where I want to go! But you need to make it a habit to not let work be everything to you. If you don't make the good habit now, it'll be hard to break it later. I find I'm happier at work and more productive when I create that balance and say I'm 100% at work when I'm there but I'll leave it at the door when I go. It's REALLY hard in the line of work we are in and especially so if you're a shift worker because work impacts your sleep schedule and social life, too. But take your vacation. Go on dates even if you might move soon. Spend time with friends and family. Enjoy your hobbies. You'll be happier at work, too.

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

Christina: Be okay with not knowing everything. Embracing a life-long learning attitude is probably one of the most beneficial qualities I've seen in leaders and mentors. They find ways to learn from successes and failures and therefore don't get too worked up over the failures.

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

Christina: Most people see this question as 'what job' do you want in 5 years and I've learned the real answer to that question is: "I have no idea." In the past 5 years I've had 2 jobs that didn't even exist when I started in the NWS! So I want to be open to possibilities, especially in the face of so much change in our industry. Instead, I've started taking this question as "What types of things do you want to be doing?" I know I want to be helping make the lives of NOAA employees a little better or easier...whether it's improving or developing new tools, training, or programs for them. That way our folks on the front lines can best serve the country in the face of disasters. I'd love to be leading a team as a supervisor to expand the ways I can help. Exactly what that looks like? Who knows!

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

Christina: It's amazing to think how much the field has changed even since I started. I think the trend toward finding better ways to communicate the impacts of weather will continue. I hope we will expand our thinking to more resilience than just the more immediate preparation & response, though. With the increasing cost of disasters, I expect at some point we will be partnering more with insurance industry and policy makers to try to reduce the losses through better planning and rebuilding in the aftermath. I also expect to see more cross-disciplinary work with other environmental and emergency response organizations.

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

Christina: I love to travel. Part of that is to catch up with friends and family who are spread around but also to experience new cultures and ways of seeing the world. In 2017 I completed my mission to visit all 50 states so now I have to pick a new goal! I also enjoy reading & having an artistic outlet...which lately has been me trying to learn how to play the ukulele.

