Transcript of "Special Episode: AMS Early Career Leadership Academy"

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversation about Careers in Meteorology and Beyond

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Kelly Savoie:

Welcome to the American Meteorological Society's podcast series, Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations about Careers in Meteorology and Beyond. I'm Kelly Savoie, and I'm here with Rex Horner, and we'll be your hosts. We're excited to have Becky DePodwin, Leyon Greene, and Matt Lacke, the organizers of the AMS Early Career Leadership Academy on the show today to talk about this great program and how it builds and sustains a diverse network of early career leaders in weather, water, and climate science.

Kelly Savoie:

Thank you all for joining us.

Rex Horner:

What we'd love to do now is hear a little bit about each of you and how you got involved with ECLA. That's the Early Career Leadership Academy's acronym. Becky, let's start with you. What is your relationship to ECLA?

Becky DePodwin:

Well, thanks for having us on today. My relationship with ECLA started as one of the inaugural members of the 2018 class. There were 35 participants selected, and I was fortunate enough to be one of them. So, I went through that first class. We had our in-person meeting in Washington, D.C. That was in conjunction with the Washington Forum. And I had such a phenomenal experience that I decided I wanted to get involved. And so, when the advisory committee asked for some of the past participants to be involved in the planning, I jumped at the chance and have been on the planning committee since then, stepping into a co-chair role with Matt in spring of 2019.

Rex:

Great. Leyon, how did you start with ECLA?

Leyon Greene:

I guess you'd say I had a very untraditional road. I came to what was formerly the Board on Women and Minorities. So, I got invited onto that board by a former member. Didn't know anything about it, was glad for the opportunity, and it taught me a lot more about what AMS had to offer to its participants and what it meant to be in AMS. And then, being an active member on formerly the Board on Women and Minorities, now BRAID, which is the Board for Representation, Accessibility, Inclusivity and Diversity. Yes, it's a big name. I was asked to become a member of ECLA. And then, once I became a member it was, "Oh, would you like to be a chair?" And, luckily, Matt and Becky were also there to provide a lot of mentorship, and that's how I became part of it and co-chair for the 2020 class.

Rex:

So, not only does ECLA teach leadership, it provides itself within its organization a lot of leadership opportunities for folks coming from different directions, Becky as an alumni, Leyon as an AMS member involved with other activities. Matt, tell me your story.

Matt Lacke:

My story starts at being an inaugural member of actually the AMS Board for Early Career Professionals. I was a member of that, a former chair, as well. And as I was rotating off of that board, I was asked if I wanted to join and be an inaugural planning committee member of ECLA. So, I jumped from one early career initiative within AMS and now just completed my third class of ECLA.

Rex:

It sounds like the AMS community always finds the next volunteer opportunity for everyone to take. Just as soon as they finish one role, there's something else for them.

Matt:

Exactly.

Kelly:

And Becky, I wanted to ask you, you had said that there's an application process for ECLA. Could you tell us a little bit about how you apply for the program and how many people are accepted?

Becky:

Yeah. When I was applying for the class, you filled out, I think, it was just a Google form with several questions talking a little bit about your career, how you viewed leadership, what you were hoping to get out of the program, just general questions like that. I think that form is still the same. We haven't updated that a lot in the past couple of years.

Becky:

The big change that we did make from the first class to the next two was to reduce the class size. The first class size, like I said, was 35 members, and a lot of the feedback from that class was that it was a little large and it was little bit harder to A, get to know everyone throughout the course of the program; and B, for many lasting, meaningful connections with more than just a few people who were in peer-mentor groups. So, for the 2019 and 2020 classes, we reduced the class size to between 20 and 25. That's allowed people to really get to know everyone in the class at least a little bit, instead of just being a name and a Zoom box or someone they weren't able to fully get a chance to talk to at an in-person meeting.

Kelly:

And is there a selection committee if you have several people applying?

Becky:

Yes. We are part of the planning committee. We're the co-chairs of the planning committee. Above is what we call the advisory committee that consists of Maureen McCann as the chair of the Commission

on Professional Affairs and Kevin Goebbert as the chair of Education and Human Resources, I think is the new name. But they are the chairs of the advisory committee, and they will form a selection committee. When the applications are coming in, they will review all the applications and then make the final selections of the 20 to 25 participants.

Becky:

Matt, I don't know if you can speak to where they pull the selection committee from. I don't know if it's formalized, or if they just... I can't remember. It's been so long since this happened.

Matt:

They try to rotate who's on that committee, and they really want a spectrum of people from early, mid, and late career on the advisory committee. So, it's a complete separate entity from the planning committee, because they don't want any cross amongst people on that. That way, they have a range of people within their careers to be able to go through all the applications. And then, all get together and discuss the applications and who they think should be a part of the class.

Kelly:

Matt, how did ECLA come about? What's the history of it and its core mission?

Matt:

Well, ECLA began actually as an idea from former AMS President Mary Glackin when she was still working at IBM. She had envisioned that the AMS [could create] a professional development experience for early career professionals, especially women and unrepresented minorities. She noticed that that was lacking within the AMS and really in the field all together.

Matt:

When she went to the AMS with this, they realized that this crossed two different parts or boards of AMS, one being the former Board on Women and Minorities, which is now BRAID, and then the Board for Early Career Professionals. And those two boards actually are under two different commissions, which as Becky had just said before, was the Commission on Professional Affairs and Commission on Education and Human Resources.

Matt:

So, they decided to actually try to do a first joint commission endeavor and connect the two commissions in order to put on this program. This is the first time it's ever been done before within the AMS. And that process started around, I'd say, 2016, 2017. And now, we've had three classes between 2018, 2019, and then the extended 2020 class.

Rex:

Matt, let's just check in. What is the definition of an early career scientist?

Matt:

That's a good question. We take our definition that's generally accepted by the AMS, which is a scientist who is within 10 years of having earned their greatest graduate degree or within 15 years of having earned their bachelor's degree, whichever is greater. Consideration is also given to those that are in the

early stages of their career but have seen [their career] interrupted for about 5 to 10 years due to either family leaves, military service, or anything else similar.

Matt:

When applying for ECLA, you have to meet three different criteria. One of them is fit that early career definition. You have to be a member of the AMS, and you have to work within the weather, water, and climate science enterprise, and that also includes education and policy.

Rex:

Do you find a good number of folks that have had the "interrupted" career experience, that gap due to family leave or military service—in what number do they apply versus someone that's followed a very straightforward trajectory from college?

Matt:

I would say it is probably less than 10% of who applies. It's a small amount of people. We get mostly the ones that fit the 10 years from graduate degree or 15 years after your bachelor's. But it's a small number that do apply. And there have been some who have gone through the program who had an interrupted leave.

Rex:

It seems like a very important consideration. I think it's pretty thoughtful to include that. Do you know is that part of the definition within the larger AMS definition, or was that added to help bring in more people specifically to ECLA?

Matt:

I believe that that was this program itself.

Rex:

Great.

Kelly:

So Becky, what types of feedback have you received from past participants?

Becky:

We do evaluations throughout the program. We have three, what we call, leadership webinars throughout the program. We have peer-mentor calls, and then obviously it all culminates in ideally an in-person meeting. This year's was obviously virtual. But throughout all of that, we are taking evaluations in and then iterating the program and planning based on the feedback that's been received.

Becky:

Some of the common themes are how much people enjoy connecting with people within the weather, water, climate enterprise they normally would have never really had a chance to meet. So, take someone who's in the private sector getting to know someone on the water side working in government, when else would their paths have ever crossed?

Becky:

We focus a lot on science communication. Those [activities] often receive really positive feedback. It's a topic that comes up a lot in the application process. We do also center some of the topics that come up that we choose to focus on throughout the program based on what applicants have listed in their application process as something that they want to get out of the program.

Becky:

We also focus heavily on diversity, equity, and inclusion topics. We had a really great session during our virtual meeting this past March with speakers, some of the feedback on that talking about the depth and the carefulness at which the speakers were selected, the topics that were selected.

Becky:

And interestingly enough too with this program this last year that was drawn out about a year, people said they didn't think they would have had the same experience in the 3-month or 4-month course than they had with it being drawn out to a year, because it really strengthened the bond, particularly between their peer-mentor group, which are the smaller groups of four to five people that focus on more in-depth conversation within the larger program itself.

Kelly:

Has there been any not negative feedback but suggestions for improvement that you've done to change the program besides the class size? Has there been anything else?

Becky:

Yeah, we're always careful about where we choose to have the in-person meeting. We try to find a central location. We've definitely had some feedback on the barriers of the cost to attend. Something that we're trying to take into consideration when choosing the location is making sure it's an accessible place via airport, that it's centralized, that the cost to attend and stay at a hotel isn't too high.

Becky:

But we have also pivoted to certain topics and tried to focus more on not just DEI within the weather, water, climate enterprise but getting those outside perspectives, bringing people in whose voices we normally would not hear from if it was just at a scientific conference, and making sure that we're getting those really valuable perspectives.

Becky:

As far as any other specific changes, Matt, can you think of anything over the last couple years that we've adjusted significantly?

Matt:

No. The only other thing I think of is sometimes early career professionals early—they have problems getting off of work. So, when they apply to the program, they have to really check with their management beforehand whether they can take the time to attend the webinars and then the in-person meeting, as well. And as Becky said before, if it's cost-prohibitive as well, we try to, if the money's available, to help those that need travel funds in some way, but that's not really available for everyone.

Rex:

Matt, have you been able to help coach any applicants at the stage that someone would discuss it with their manager about joining this conference? Have you been able to help coach them as far as how to broach this topic and how to make a value proposition for it that seems to be more receptive than maybe another way?

Matt:

One thing we did this year with our virtual meetings is realize that when you're showing up in person, you can completely get away from work and not have to deal with work duties. This year, what we did is realize that some people might not be able to do that since they're going to be from home and that their managers or supervisors might still require them to do work.

Matt:

We actually drafted a letter. The whole planning committee. We drafted a letter that would go to supervisors and managers explaining the significance of the program and how not only would it help their employee within the field but also help them in their workplace as well and make them better leaders and function better within their organizations.

Rex:

So, it was sort of a double-edged sword. The virtual component allowed greater access by removing the travel barrier, but it also opened up the fact that you might still be available to your work while at home, because it's not as clear that you're away, physically distanced. What you tried to do was blunt the edge of that sword with this letter. Very interesting to hear that.

Rex:

Becky, I'd like to ask you next, how does your program, ECLA, approach the definition of leadership? Do you feel, for instance, that participants in the conference come with the same definition of leadership, or do you sculpt a more either complex or unique definition at the conference?

Becky:

Well, really what we're trying to do throughout the entire program from start to finish is have the participants walk away with what their personal definition is of leadership. We do make it very clear that leadership in this context is not being a manager. There's that clear difference in that you can be a leader amongst your peers, you can be a leader who is in a leadership position within your organization, you can be a leader within, say, a society like AMS and chair a board or a committee. But we really want people to develop and think really critically about what their personal leadership style is.

Becky:

So, one of the first things we do at the very start of the program, at least the past two classes, was to have them take, it's called the CliftonStrengths leadership assessment. Right off the bat, either they take this quiz and it helps lay out what are their top five strengths—I think there is 30 to 35 overall—and it ranks them in order. We'll have a couple of different sessions around that to A, talk about your strengths, talk about someone who has a top five strength that's actually one of your weaknesses, and discuss the differences there and what you can learn from each other.

Becky:

But ultimately, we hope that people walk away with an understanding of what leadership looks like at different levels, of whether you are a manager of people, whether you're a peer-mentor, whether you are someone who is very high up in your career. We've had several past AMS presidents come on and talk about what leadership means to them. And so, just this understanding that A, you can be a leader no matter where you are; and B, to get a sense for how you want to move forward in your career wherever you are at that point in time and expand upon being a leader yourself in that capacity.

Rex:

That's great. So, it's an individualistic definition of leadership. You're not preaching or broadcasting. It's sort of umbrella term for what leadership means. It's not just a seminar. It's a real workshop that engages and finds a unique definition.

Kelly:

Leyon, I wanted to ask you about what the obstacles are for early career scientists and why they need help. Does it depend on the type of field of meteorology that people are working, sector, or anything like that? Could you give us a little bit of information about that?

Leyon:

That's a nice question. The answer why they need help in this day and age, there's still institutional barriers that early career professionals still have to go through to get a leg up and even when you do get a leg up just to continue within your field.

Leyon:

The field of meteorology is very diverse. Weather, water, and climate are just three very thin, overreaching terminologies for a much bigger field, especially when you're talking about renewable energy, analytical forecasting, and those other types of fields that are out there. When it comes to meteorology, it's about having somebody who can broach those topics for you to get in. As a former academic, a lot of us don't know that these are the opportunities that are available unless you have somebody who can tell you and somebody who can be a mentor, which is one of those other programs that AMS does have—a mentorship program—the Board for [Private Sector Meteorologists], which I'm also a member of. They have a very good mentorship program that aligns you to individuals that are in these diverse fields of meteorology that we don't know about, and they can provide the access and the knowledge of how to get into these fields. So yes, institutional barriers is one of those things.

Leyon:

The other thing is just lack of experience coming from getting your degree. You've been taught meteorology but then the experience now of applying it, unless you've really done some type of post-doc, which also defines you specifically to a specific field. When you're in your graduate program or undergraduate program, you have research experience by doing field work. You're also being pigeoned into where you can go. One of the things we found within ECLA is that sometimes we don't exactly do what we graduated in, but we're still meteorologists, right? We become hydrologists. We become forecasters for renewable energy, economic standpoint for economic forecaster. Sometimes we just do something completely different.

Leyon:

It's those things, and then the other question you had was obstacles that they face. Some of it, I can tell you firsthand out of experience. Some of it is from learning from others. But we still do have age discrimination, race discrimination, gender discrimination. It's still there. We're working on it. Society's still working on it. But it's still there.

Leyon:

The other thing I would like to say is as an early professional, you do have experience. It's a different type of experience. But it's how do an organization acknowledge that experience that you bring, and then including it within the organization to make it better? Because we all bring something to an organization when we get hired. It's just acknowledging what we bring.

Leyon:

And then, the other side of that I would like to say is being a leader, it's about acknowledging your strengths or weaknesses. Like Becky said earlier, one of the things we teach in ECLA is we go to this learning leadership styles, right? Leadership skills, we find out what are your skills, what are your strengths. And you're not only able to acknowledge what your strengths or weaknesses are, but you're able to now see those strengths and weakness in your cohorts, in your partners. And you can say, "Oh, so this is how somebody who's strong in this or who's weak in this overcome it by doing this," and, "Oh, I'm strong in this, but you're weak in that, and how do I overcome it?" So, you're able to play off of each other.

Leyon:

And having those strengths or weaknesses is good, but the other side of it too, something I like to say, is self doubt. How do you as an early professional overcome your self doubt to make yourself a leader and to stand up and not be stand down or standoffish when somebody says—what's the word I'm looking for?—you're trying to be too far ahead of yourself? “You're young. Take your time. Slow down. Understand the organization. Take your time and become a leader.”

Leyon:

But as young professionals, we want to get right in and make the changes, do the things that society want us to do, which is to step up, be progressive, move us forward. And it's balancing that as an early career professional is one of those obstacles that we try to teach at ECLA.

Leyon:

So, for me, just overall it's just you do have institutional barriers. You still do have age, race, gender, but it's also about overcoming your self doubt as a leader. Those are some of the barriers.

Rex:

Let's dig in to some of the actual content of the conference. For instance, on the website to apply, it mentions a few issues: workplace issues, crisis management, building trust, conflict resolution, communication, looking at key societal trends, and looking at diversity, equity, inclusion—Leyon, which you've talked about.

Rex:

How does the examination of these issues look like in practice? If I wanted to apply to ECLA, and I really wanted to see a concrete example of how I'd work through some of these things like crisis management or conflict resolution, how do you game out those scenarios at the conference?

Becky:

Between the leadership webinars, in particular the virtual or in-person meeting, we try to have a mix of session types so we're not just having someone or some people talk at the participants the entire time. One of the more interactive ones, and one we've gotten a lot of good feedback on, is a session on conflict resolution. What we do is divide everybody into four to five groups and put a conflict in front of them, a paragraph. They're conflicts that the planning committee came up with. They're usually ones that we've experienced in our workplaces, in our professional lives. And we have the participants discuss the conflict in their smaller groups, talk about steps they would take to resolve it, talk about how they would approach it from different perspectives. And then, we bring everybody back together in a group. We share what the conflict was and how they went about it. And then, there's a whole group discussion.

Becky:

It's a really valuable way to get just a lot of different perspectives. I know one of the conflicts that I had suggested, as a planner of this event, I came away with different perspective on how I could have approached a conflict in my own personal and professional life. That's one example.

Becky:

Usually, if we're going to bring in speakers, we'll have a mix of them either presenting, and then we usually try and make it a dialogue. So, the participants are able to ask questions. They're able to have a conversation with the speakers and make sure that they're really getting the most out of the sessions. Sometimes we'll break the groups off into smaller groups, and we'll have a smaller group of class members with one of the speakers, and then you rotate them around.

Becky:

Really, being virtual gave us a lot of flexibility from that standpoint. We were able to, I think, bring in a lot of pretty unique speakers that we may not have had access to were we trying to bring them to a specific location for an in-person meeting.

Rex:

Sure. Matt, would you like to tell us a little bit about one of those more unique speakers you brought to the conference this year that you maybe wouldn't have been able to bring in in the past?

Matt:

Yeah, it was actually one of our sessions on DEI. It was how to be an ally or advocate, and we were able to bring in some speakers that were both within the sciences and outside of the sciences. We had a speaker from NASA, but then we also had two people from CUNY in New York that really we just found online that had written books and gave a lot of professional talks across the nation on this topic. There is no way we would have ever had these people in person, and they provided so much more outside perspective on things than we typically would hear within the weather, water, and climate enterprise.

The class members really responded to that saying how much they appreciated hearing a different perspective than they're used to hearing within our field.

Kelly:

Leyon mentioned that sometimes people don't really know when they graduate all the different other fields of expertise and avenues that they can go through to get a different position, maybe something that they didn't even think of. Do you have that as part of ECLA as well where you talk about areas, say, in the private sector that people might not have considered?

Matt:

Well, our focus really isn't on, I guess, finding a job per se. We try to integrate different people. Because a lot of times when we think of AMS, or just our field in general, we think meteorology, weather, and that's it, but also forget that there's other parts of that with climate and water, as well. We try to incorporate people that are within those professions within this program, and then try to bring in speakers that they can hear from within what they do as well, because a lot of times we don't hear all those voices. It's always so just weather-focused, and that's it.

Kelly:

I guess there are probably some people who are like, "Ooh, I didn't even really know that existed, and that sounds really cool," and, "Gee, maybe I need a career change." So, it's good that you have all those different people come together to talk with each other and just brainstorm about all these different things and options that are available to them. That's great.

Matt:

And sometimes those people don't necessarily cross paths.

Kelly:

Right.

Matt:

So, this is an opportunity for those people to cross paths that they never would've before or might never have or will.

Becky:

Yeah, just a quick quote from one of the participants, I'm not sure from which year, but, "I'm so impressed by the depth and carefulness of thought of so many of the participants. It's exciting to be a part of, particularly because their experiences and histories are often different than mine, which is the value of diversity."

Kelly:

Right. Becky had talked a little bit about the ECLA committees. Matt, did you want to give us a little bit more detail about the structure and hierarchy of how it's formed?

Matt:

Yeah. There's two committees. You have an advisory committee and a planning committee. The advisory committee is chaired by the Commissioner of Professional Affairs and the Commissioner of Education and Human Resources. Those two select all the planning committee members, and then they also assemble a team to review the applications and select the participants in the program. And then, the advisory committee also provides any guidance that's needed within planning or anything else that goes on within the program.

Matt:

And then, the planning committee is actually comprised of people that are currently or used to be a member of BRAID or the Board for Early Career Professionals, or they could have been a former ECLA class member, as well. The planning committee is responsible for all the aspects of planning of ECLA, setting the timeline for activities, developing the program agenda, creating the application and consultation with the advisory committee and AMS staff, and then executing the program, as well.

Kelly:

Yeah, it's a huge undertaking. It must take several months to get this all organized and a lot of hands, a lot of help?

Matt:

Yeah, it typically starts about six months before the program even takes off, really. And then, you go through the application process. And really, you only briefly do any actual programming or come up with an agenda for what to do. You just do a brief outline, because we like to see what's in the applications. The planning committee doesn't actually get to see those, but we get feedback from the advisory committee on what they review within those and the topics that were brought up in the applications that people maybe really want more exposure to or need more learning about. We really try to use those topics as guidance for how to actually shape the program so it's not like a cookie-cutter program where we're going to do the same thing every year. There's some topics, yeah, that are applicable to everybody, but we want to make sure that we hit on the needs of the class, as well. That's what the focus of a lot of our programming is.

Kelly:

Do you allow people to go through it more than once, or it's like a one-and-done, you apply, you go through it, and that's your shot, and you need to open it up to someone else?

Matt:

It's a one-and-done. However, we encourage the class members to continue doing what they were doing with the class members to stay in touch. What we have throughout the program is peer mentoring calls. These are set up at the very beginning of the program. We break up the class into four different groups, and they have monthly phone calls with each other. They act both as a mentor and a mentee to each other.

Matt:

And the calls are designed that they can bring up anything they want within this. It could be about a topic that was discussed and dealt with within ECLA or maybe someone has an issue with the workplace or at home. It creates a really strong bond amongst those people in order for them to be able to open up and talk about anything and everything within a comfortable environment.

Matt:

After the program's over, we encourage these groups to continue doing these calls. There's still calls from the very first class in 2018 that are still going on in those peer mentoring groups. So, while they can't go through the program again, they are constantly involved within the program moving forward if they choose to do so with their other class members.

Rex:

Matt has touched on what I wanted to ask about next, which is how the networking and the connections made during the formal ECLA program and activities are sustained among the class members beyond the conference. And so, I heard from Matt that these calls would happen still. So, from 2018 was the initial conference, and now it's 2021, and these connections are still live. They're still active.

Rex:

Becky, do you at a programmatic level offer any support or encouragement for keeping these networking relationships alive and these personal relationships alive after the conference ends?

Becky:

Right. So as Matt said, we definitely encourage the peer-mentor groups to continue. We do let go of that as the planning committee members and say, "This is on you to sustain now." And by and large, they have been sustained. It's certainly still groups meeting quarterly, monthly even.

Becky:

But even beyond that, at the annual AMS meeting and then some of the satellite meetings, we try to encourage meetups of past ECLA members. At the annual meeting, moving forward, we're hoping to have every year a reception for all past ECLA participants so that not only can they return and network amongst their class, they can start to network amongst all of the classes. So, it will be three classes for AMS 2022 in Houston.

Becky:

Our hope is that it can continue to just grow and expand this network of people who have gone through the program, who have had this similar yet different experience year to year, and that they can make those connections whether it be to get a new job, whether it's to find a mentor, to be a mentor to somebody, any of that. We do want to make sure that there is that cross-class connection there and keep those connections and networking opportunities going.

Kelly:

Becky, during the pandemic, how did you handle that? You had people who had applied, and then did you do some surveys and ask people what they were comfortable doing? I'm sure it was rough.

Becky:

So many surveys. We kicked off the 2020 class in February. Or early March was the orientation webinar with the first leadership webinar taking place in late March. Obviously, that was three weeks of just pretty much utter chaos where no one knew what the world was going to look like in two weeks from then, much less three months. Our in-person meeting was supposed to be in June, and I think we figured out pretty early on, obviously, with the help of AMS, that it wasn't going to happen.

Becky:

So, we took a survey at that point and still had in our head, hey, maybe fall.

Kelly:

Like everyone did.

Becky:

Right?

Kelly:

Ooh, it will be all over in the fall. Not.

Becky:

I think our first survey was talking about if people would be comfortable in person in the fall or if virtual... And then, we had at least one or two additional surveys asking people what their comfort level would be, if they would be okay with virtual. And then, obviously we ultimately made a decision to go completely virtual in March of this year.

Becky:

I think it was important to have that—maybe closure isn't the right word—but to have a decision made, to draw a line in the sand, and for especially the planning committee's sake, to move forward with all of our energy and focus dedicated toward making it the best virtual meeting that we possibly could, which, I will say, I really think we succeeded at.

Becky:

I want to give a big shout-out to the planning committee who extended their commitment to this program by a year and planned, put together, a very thought-out, really, really phenomenal virtual meeting. A lot of hard work went into it, a lot of meetings, a lot of emails, a lot of back and forth and discussions. And really, we did try to take into account the needs and the preferences of the participants.

Becky:

But we did also have some international class members, and so we really needed to take that into account as well and make sure that this was as inclusive as possible. And ultimately, the virtual meeting ended up being the most inclusive format that we could do at this point in time without have to really push back the meeting.

Kelly:

How many people are on the planning committee?

Becky:

There are nine of us, so three co-chairs and then six other planning committee members.

Kelly:

Great job. That was tough.

Rex:

Becky, I understand you used some more unique digital tools than your standard web conference fare when it came to being engaging with the virtual platform. Can you tell us a little bit about some of the fun ones that you came up with?

Becky:

I mean, I can't take credit for any of them, really. We did use Zoom as the main host, and we relied heavily on breakout rooms, which were really, really useful. A more logistic thing, when we were bringing in speakers for the next session, as they were coming in and one session was ending, we would toss them with the session chairs into a breakout room and then flip it around to be back in the main room. It worked out flawlessly.

Becky:

But as far as some of the more networking tools, Maria Molina came up with or found what's called Gather Town and created this whole virtual world that had little coffee shops, it had a rocket, it had a graduation stage, it had a bar.

Kelly:

Cool.

Becky:

And what you would do is create a little avatar, and you would walk through the thing. And as soon as you were within proximity of someone, you would be able to hear and see them on camera. And so, you could have one-on-one meetings off in a coffee shop where you could go and play games. You could play poker. You could play Pictionary. It was a really, really cool tool, and Maria did a fantastic job and had a blast designing the whole thing. The class really seemed to enjoy that during the breaks, during the evening, more informal, networking sessions.

Becky:

And then, we had another one that Brian Smoliak came up with that was called Icebreaker. That was something where it would just shuffle you around a bit like speed dating and put you in a room with one person with a series of questions to page through and just talk about very random things like, “what do you prefer for your toppings on pizza?” and a bit more serious questions like “Where do you want to travel?” Just a way to get to know people a little better and not just a consistently academic format, the networking that you would normally do after a conference when you're trying to unwind and relax.

Rex:

Sure. First you disarm them with pizza, and then you hit them with the hard stuff after that.

Becky:

Exactly.

Rex:

So, GatherTown, it's like an 8-bit video game, like an early Nintendo game. You have a little pixelated avatar that walks around like something out of that Wreck-It Ralph movie, like the little arcade games. Really interesting and sounds like it was really well-received.

Rex:

Leyon, I'd like to ask our final question to you. We've looked at the past. We've looked at this year of the pandemic. And now, I'd like to ask you what you think the future looks like, you and your other planning committee members for ECLA.

Leyon:

First off, I'd like to say nothing but positiveness when it comes to ECLA, from what the past members have done, Becky and Matt, specifically, the work they've done, the existing planning committee, and the fact that we're going to have four of the existing members back for the new upcoming class going forward. And I think each one of us is going to have an extended year, so we're going to be there for the next group. So, I see nothing but positiveness.

Leyon:

The other side of it is the engagement by AMS leadership as to the importance of AMS that also contributes to where I see ECLA going, active interest from cohorts and past participants into ECLA. The number of applicants is only going up, so there's a positive interest for what ECLA is contributing to AMS and the broader society as a whole. Positive feedback that ECLA is continuously receiving from each cohort shows that we're doing the right thing. We're meeting the needs of the cohorts, and we're meeting the needs of what the workforce is requiring. So, it can't do anything but be continuously positive.

Leyon:

The other side of that too is the speakers that are coming in. They are diverse, and they are also acknowledging the impact that ECLA is doing in terms of its diversity. The response that the cohorts and the questions that the cohorts are asking of the panelists. It's also created intrigue from the panelists as to, okay, these are people who are going to contribute to the science, going to contribute to the workplace, and the institutions.

Leyon:

And the other side of it is just the leadership structure that has been created in ECLA, the fact that there is acknowledging the past, acknowledging the present chair. So, you have a past, a present, and, in a sense, an incoming chair. They're all able to be part of the leadership structure. So, you have past knowledge to help you and guide you, and then the person who is coming in for the future can also learn, “Why are we doing this?” And then, not only are you learning why are we doing this, but you're

able to contribute what is the next stage so it's not, what I should say, step learning. It's a smooth polynomial curve in the leadership curve so everybody's building on what the past is doing towards a better ECLA.

Leyon:

And that type of foundation to me is nothing but positive when it comes to ECLA and where I can see the program is going, what it's going to do, its impact to its cohorts, and its impact to the institutions to which these cohorts are going to be placed into, and then the impact that these cohorts are going to make in terms of leadership and impacting the weather, water, and climate community as a whole. So overall, we're doing a really fine job.

Kelly:

I mean, it's such a worthwhile and positive program. You hit the nail on the head when you said that there's an increase in applications and you're doing the right things. It's like word of mouth. The cohorts that go through this have such an awesome experience that they can't help but get other people involved and just tell people you have to apply for this program.

Kelly:

Speaking of that, will the applications be open for the next cohort for our listeners who are, obviously, extremely interested now in applying?

Matt:

That typically happens at the end of the year. So, that will be later this fall or early winter. Obviously, with this past year being an expanded, almost two-year program, there's not going to be a 2021 class, unfortunately. The next class will be for 2022. Those applications we'll be accepting towards the end of this year, and people need to go to the AMS early career leadership page, which you just google AMS ECLA. That's the first thing that comes up, and it will take you directly to that webpage. And if you just keep looking at it continuously toward the end of the year, there will be a link on there for people to apply.

Kelly:

Well, thank you all so much for joining us and giving us a really, really great overview of the Early Career Leadership Academy. We really appreciate your time.

Becky:

Thanks for giving us the chance to talk about it and share how wonderful it is.

Matt:

Yeah, thank you for having us.

Leyon:

Thank you so much.

Kelly:

Well, that's our show for today. Please join us next time, rain or shine.

Rex:

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations about Careers in Meteorology and Beyond is a podcast by the American Meteorological Society. Our show is produced by Brandon Crose and edited by Peter Trepke. Our theme music is composed and performed by Steve Savoie, and the show is hosted by Rex Horner and Kelly Savoie. You can learn more about the show online at www.ametsoc.org/clearskies and can contact us at skypodcast@ametsoc.org if you have any feedback or if you would like to become a future guest.