

# SPOTLIGHT SERIES: ALUMNI, WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANA ZANGRONIZ

BY ALEXANDRA PURITZ & JOLETTA SILVA



**Ana Zangroniz**

**Track: Marine Conservation (MCO)**

**Graduated: May 2014**

## **What is your current job and main responsibilities?**

I work at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Coral Reef Conservation Program, as the Awareness and Appreciation Coordinator. I am in charge of coordinating the awareness, appreciation, education, and outreach projects for our program. The Coral Reef Conservation Program was created to manage the northernmost section of the Florida Reef Tract, which is 105 miles of reef north of Biscayne National Park, bordering Miami-Dade County and running through the St. Lucie Inlet in Martin County. My position evolved to include serving as the communications point of contact with our umbrella parent organization in Tallahassee. Currently my biggest role is working on the Our Florida Reefs final report. Our Florida Reefs is a community-based planning project that uses a community-engagement process for management recommendations. One of the main focuses of the organization is long-term fieldwork projects such as reef visual censuses, scuba ID counts, and fish databases. The reef tract never had a formal management plan in the past, but now I am to helping facilitate that through work and

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suggestions for management driven by stakeholders from all four countries. Work on this report has been underway since 2005, and my office is taking and integrating feedback and producing a final report for the entire process.

### **Tell us about your MPS internship.**

I completed a lionfish internship with Biscayne National Park for ten months. This was a bit of an anomaly since most of the Marine Conservation students did not go into field-based internships. I was a bit hesitant at first but wanted to increase my scientific experience, which is part of the reason that I gravitated towards the program-I am not from a science background. The main focus of my internship was to help the park implement a lionfish management program which included lionfish removals. Another important aspect was to help communicate the significance of the invasion to school-aged children. I developed an education outreach presentation, and then later redesigned it to create concepts that students would understand and better connect with. I taught students to dissect fish and helped them to understand what can be learned from lionfish gut content. I used PowerPoint software, as well as demonstrations with explanations of dissections, including venomous spine removal. I also helped implement the Teacher Ranger program.

### **What were your favorite classes at RSMAS and why?**

My favorite classes at RSMAS included research diving and Professor Manoj Shivilani's Ocean Policy class. Professor Shivilani's research has

been incorporated here at Our Florida Reefs, and his research on community fishing and public perception of the state of reefs was very interesting and helpful to me. I loved how he gave freedom in choosing what to read and also tried to create and facilitate discussions. He encouraged productivity and these discussions really helped with the development of the final project. It was great to see what we talked about in class actually being practiced through research and implementation in these projects. Additionally, one of my best decisions was insisting on getting into the research diving class- it opened the door for my internship, as I needed the AAUS certification which eventually led to my current job, and was extremely instrumental in my future.

### **What is your favorite RSMAS memory?**

I love that RSMAS is a dog-friendly campus. Three weeks before I moved to Miami my dog Snorkel died, and then I showed up here and there were dogs everywhere. It was nice to take a minute to take a load off and spend time with dogs for a half hour.

### **What piece of advice would you give to current or incoming MPS students?**

Be open to new ideas, whether it be different classes or internships. For me the majority of the other students going into lionfish research were in the Tropical Marine Ecology track, but I had such a great experience with my internship and current job. People can get pigeonholed with tracks; don't be afraid to look into new and different fields or ideas.

**Thanks for your advice Ana, and for sharing these responses with us!**