

SPOTLIGHT SERIES: ALUMNI, WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

AN INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN RODRIGUEZ

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Track: Weather Forecasting (WFC)

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What is your current job and main responsibilities?

I am a Deputy State Meteorologist at the Florida Division of Emergency Management in Tallahassee. I serve as a liaison between the meteorology community and the emergency management community, and work on gathering and interpreting weather data from NOAA, the National Weather Service, and the National Hurricane Center. My job is to analyze and interpret this data and change it into viable information for emergency managers to use as precise data in terms of impacts and protective measures. Science and technological data can be difficult to understand, so I present it in a straightforward way that anyone can grasp. I work on many projects including: travel outlooks for the state legislature; a biweekly five-day weather forecast for the entire state to be used by emergency managers and core partners (including the Department of Transportation, the Department of Health, and various academic institutions); and even daily situational reports on all weather patterns such as rip currents and other severe weather patterns. This profession is a great platform to gain experience and understand how emergency management operates.

Tell us about your MPS internship.

I completed my MPS internship at the Weather Forecast Office in Miami on the FIU campus. I primarily worked on the impact catalog, which is a project under development by the National Weather Service. This program tries to help communicate weather and climate-related data and informational warnings to other emergency managers, who are the core customers of the National Weather Service. This involves taking technical information and displaying it graphically in a more straightforward way, which is a skill I apply to my current job as well. While at the Weather Forecast Office, I made many professional connections and got to know all of the people in the Miami office, which is a great network to have. Also, I was able to present my research at the American Meteorological Society's Annual Conference and made a poster about my research. Networking helped me secure my current volunteer work at the Weather Forecast Office in Tallahassee.

What were your favorite classes at RSMAS and why?

My favorite class was GIS with Maria Estevanez. I thought it would be useful, but I didn't realize how useful it would be at least until my current job, where my division has its GIS unit. It is cool being able to jump in and help with their projects and expand my knowledge in that area. I am glad to have that background experience and she is a great teacher; the way she taught is very useful and it is the best class I have taken in terms of skills learned and how they can be applied to my career.

What is your favorite RSMAS memory?

My favorite RSMAS memory is a snorkeling trip in Key Largo that I went on with my marine and atmospheric science education class on the last Saturday of the semester. I am from Miami and had not been snorkeling in a long time. Also, I enjoyed going to UM football and basketball games.

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

I would give two pieces of advice. First, take classes outside of your main concentration, especially when you think they will be useful in your career (for me, this was GIS). Also, on main campus I took a disaster management and humanitarian class, where I learned about emergency management and disaster situations in a humanitarian and global context of how responses have evolved over the past 100 years, which applies to my career now. Second, take as much as possible out of your internship. Even if you think it is something you cannot do, ask anyway because they may need a helping hand and you never know where that can lead you. Take every opportunity! During my internship, I was not just working on the impact catalog, but I also took the opportunity to shadow forecasters, learn about the different roles of forecasters and the management team, their data management practices and operation system, and how the weather service operates. I also got to learn about upper air observation through launching the weather balloon, tracking and submitting its data. I do this through my volunteer work at the Weather Forecast Office in Tallahassee as well.

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