Rachael Jamison Alumni Profile

Rachael Jamison is the Planning, Public Works and Environmental Director at the Port of Olympia. In this role she oversees all environmental management, sustainability reporting, regulatory environmental site assessments, compliance and capital investment, and a whole lot more. She also directs the Engineering department at the Port on infrastructure projects, remediation projects (e.g. Budd Inlet), and the City of Olympia’s sea level rise plan. Rachael leads a team of 5 (included herself) – 3 focused on environment, and 2 engineers. In addition to her multiple duties at the Port, she also coaches and leads various community events for Guerilla Running (can add hyperlink if you’d like?), an organization she started with her partner in 2007. And last, she’s completing her Master in Business Administration at St Martin’s University. Being impressively busy isn’t a recent development for Rachael.

Rachael is a twice over Greener. She completed her BS with an emphasis in microbiology in 1998, and her MES in 2003. Her thesis research – one of the parts of her MES career she remembers best – looked at women in certified organic farming programs. At that time in MES, students had the option to do an 8-credit “essay of distinction” or a 16-credit thesis (currently, all students are required to do the 16 credit option). Rachael chose the thesis, and describes that process as “miserably hard but worth it.” In her study she used a feminist empiricist theoretical framework to analyze Washington state food data about women in certified organic farming. She used a mixed method approach and analyzed her data using a variety of stats, and also compiled multiple interviews and stories of the women and work she researched. Her research concluded that, at that time, female organic farm operators “employ practices and make production choices more compatible with the organic food *movement* than do male participants…female participant in organic agriculture exemplify the philosophy that initiated the movement and can contribute to the integration of these principles into a larger-scale industry.” (Jamison 2003).

Rachael worked full time at the Washington State Department of Agriculture when she started the MES program at Evergreen. She was also a full time single mom, and because she’s a self-described “nerd”, decided she was ready for another degree. Since completing her MES, Rachael has held a variety of roles in southwest Washington. After leaving the Department of Agriculture, Rachael worked in environmental planning at the Washington Department of Ecology, and then for the Department of Natural Resources working on climate change mitigation and renewable energy programs. She then took a break from the public sector and moved into sustainability programs for Weyerhauser, based in Auburn, WA. Rachael feels strongly that more environmental leaders should consider the private sector, where she was able to implement a variety of high-impact sustainability initiatives. Her current work at the Port is “rounding out” her career in environmental management and sustainability, and her history of work in up and coming environmental fields like organic farming and sustainable operations.

Rachael’s advice to current MES students who may be struggling to tailor their degree or focus their thesis topic, is to study what you love, not what you think will get you jobs. While it might sound cliché, her thought is that this is the best way to prepare you to take jobs that you’re actually interested in. She also added that as a person who hires people, “I don’t care what you’ve studied as much as I care that you’ve completed something.” Her other point from her own career, is that not every job you might want, or be prepared for, even exists yet. Don’t limit yourself by what is currently available and go after the future opportunities you want, she says.

Reflecting on her time in MES, one of the biggest benefits of the program for Rachael is the relationships she built within her cohort, and within the greater environmental community. When partnering and collaborating with others at different agencies or organizations, she is often working with fellow MES alumni, and that initial area of similarity can do a lot when building new partnerships and opportunities.

Another great benefit of MES is it requires students to be self-motivated. Rachael has no fear asking for what she wants. A lot of other programs don’t give students this opportunity to “choose their own adventure” and grapple with all the work that may come along with this freedom. While it may be tough at the time, those skills are invaluable. Her thesis also taught her that big projects are doable. When an MES graduate comes across her desk as an applicant, she knows that they also know this truth.