Return to Evergreen

Return to Evergreen is an annual event for Evergreen alumni. In October, Return included 4 days of events, with a full day of lectures, workshops, and interactive panels at the Olympia campus on October 19. One of my counterparts in the Master of Public Administration Program (and MES alumna!), Anna Rhoads, and I decided to pull together a group of graduate alumni from the MES and MPA programs for a panel session titled “Theory to Practice: Graduate Program Alumni on a Capstone Shaping a Career.”

Panelists included:

Graham Clumpner, MES 17, Community Organizer for Mosquito Fleet

Alicia LeDuc, MPA 12, Attorney at Davis Wright Tremaine, LLP

Hilary McGowan, MES 17, Associate Planner for City of Snohomish (Snohomish county?)

Annie Pocklington, MPA 18, Program Associate for Student Support Services at the Washington Student Achievement Council

Sam Porter, MPA 17, Legislative Analyst for King County Council

Natalie Sahli, MES 16, Research Biologist at the Pacific Shellfish Institute

Sanyu Tushabe, MPA 18, Recruitment Supervisor at the Washington State Health Care Authority

The purpose of the panel was to showcase how the process of completing the required large, culminating project in MES (thesis) and MPA (capstone) often results in the first (or next) step in a student’s career. Anna and I structured our questions to focus on the project process, challenges and successes, and how their experience linked theory with practice – one of Evergreen’s five foci.

Panelists spoke about how their experience in their respective programs grew their skills in communication and critical thinking, and they had used the skills built in seminar to discuss challenging issues, sometimes with people they did not agree with in many professional scenarios since. Hilary McGowan mentioned that while she had dealt with imposter syndrome during her thesis research and writing process, she gained great confidence as she continued through the program. She mentioned how important she had found asking “why?” in her current work.

When asked what surprised them about their experience through their capstone and thesis process, several panelists mentioned gaining greater clarity, often to their frustration, about how the public may or may not interact with data and research findings. Natalie mentioned that, as a scientist, it was challenging for her to learn that people don’t necessarily just accept what science tells them, and that so much of the work is in helping the public to understand and care. This was also a theme for Graham Clumpner, who chose to write his MES thesis in the form of a fictional novel, based in climate science, with the goal to connect with a wider audience than that of an average MES thesis.

Alicia LeDuc, who traveled to Tanzania to a Benedictine mission for her MPA capstone, shared her reactions to gaining greater understanding of the cycles of poverty and oppression present in the areas she served, and that the suffering she observed was connected to greater global and societal trends. Now a corporate attorney, this experience influences how she uses her education and experience in the support of others.

As a graduate of the MES program myself, I know first-hand how powerful and important the interdisciplinary and student-focused curriculum Evergreen provides in our graduate programs is. The seven panelists were a great showcase of the wide spectrum of careers, research, and learning that students in these graduate programs pursue. We look forward to having more graduate program alumni at a future Return to Evergreen event!