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, and compliance and capital investments. Beyond all that, 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 (including herself) – 3 with environmental expertise, and 2 engineers. In addition to her copious duties at the Port, she coaches and leads various community running events. At present, Rachael is working to complete her Master in Business Administration at St Martin’s University.

Being impressively busy isn’t a recent development for Rachael. She 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 perform a 16 credit thesis). Rachel chose a 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 data about women in certified organic farming. She used a mixed methods approach and analyzed her data using a variety of statistical tests, compiling many 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 participants 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 the green building sector development at the Washington Department of Ecology, and then for the Department of Natural Resources working on climate change adaptation and renewable energy programs. She then took a break from the public sector and moved into sustainability management at Weyerhauser, based in Federal Way, 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 a job. While it might sound cliché, her thought is this approach ensures you to pursue and accept jobs that actually interest you. She also added that as a person who hires people, “I care less about the specifics of what you studied and more that you’ve completed something significant, that you have follow through.” Her other point speaks from her own career, which is that not every job you might want, or are prepared for, even exists yet. Don’t limit yourself by what is currently available and be open to opportunities you may cross paths with in the future.

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 act as a bridge to building new partnerships and opportunities.

Another great benefit of MES is it requires students to be self-motivated. Rachael is not afraid to ask 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 accompany this freedom. While it may be tough at the time, those skills are invaluable. Her thesis 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.