

Towards an Evaluation of Marine Affairs Education

Robert A. Fischer III

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Introduction

In my second seminar for the Marine Policy Masters program I will be presenting a proposal for my thesis research. The twenty minute presentation will focus mostly on the various research methods I hope to employ.

The basis of this project is to look at the current state of marine affairs education. There exists little information of the outcomes of these degree programs. How well are the programs preparing the ocean workforce? Where are recent alumni finding professional positions? What parts of their programs have been the most/least useful in their current position? What I aim to do is to take this type of information and create; first, a framework for evaluating existing programs, and second, to suggest possible ways to strengthen existing programs to more match the demands of the workforce and attract more students to the marine affairs graduate education world. Because "Marine Affairs" is an issue we (students and faculty) are all familiar with, I am looking forward to lots of good conversation as I begin to design this project.

Research Question

· Are the current graduate programs in marine affairs/ marine policy effectively preparing graduate students to enter into a dynamic professional world with the necessary skills and knowledge?

Research Instruments

The heart of the research project will be an analysis of an alumni survey in which I ask the respondents to answer questions evaluating their graduate programs. I will look into the value of the various programs through the recent alumni that have entered the workforce, whether related to marine affairs or not. Through mailed surveys I plan to ascertain certain key traits about their educational experience; degree level, first position, current position, length of degree, funding situation, and more open-ended questions on the useful skills acquired and the most important aspects of the program.

Also, in the beginning stages of my research, I will conduct open-ended less formal interviews, in person and over telephone, with important figures from the various programs. For

example, deans and program directors may be able to help me clarify and identify the intended outcomes of the marine affairs programs as well as the original impetus for creating the programs.

All of this qualitative research rests upon the foundation of more general information concerning the university curriculum and core course requirements and information about current student populations. The programs I hope to focus on include; the University of Delaware Center for Marine Policy, the University of Washington School for Marine Affairs, the University of Miami Division of Marine Affairs and Policy, and the University of Rhode Island Department of Marine Affairs.

Project Status/Project Timeline

Currently, I am working hard to develop the survey instruments and to design the less formal interviews with program directors, faculty, and deans. The more quantitative information about program curricula, class structure, current student population, and alumni graduation numbers is underway and will be completed by the middle of November. As a thesis project, I hope to have all of my surveys back by the March so that I can begin writing.

An important aspect of the current research is to use the data collected from the informal interviews and curricula data to determine what criteria exist in an effective program. What is program success? Do the intended goals of the programs match the actual outcomes? Where are, if any, the disconnects between the goals and the results?

The value of this study rests heavily on my ability to limit and focus the research material so that what is able to be analyzed produces real and meaningful results while not expanding out to too large of a project. I look forward to sharing this presentation and having discussion with my professors and fellow students.

Contact For More Information:
Robert A Fischer
CMES_Marine Policy Program
University of Delaware
Newark, DE 19716
rafisch@udel.edu