Non-academic Careers in Environmental and Marine Science Panel

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Maryland Sea Grant, in coordination with the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center REU program, hosts an annual non-academic careers panel to provide students with an opportunity to explore the broad array of directions their undergraduate (and graduate) education may take them beyond the ivory tower. We assemble a panel of 4 – 6 individuals with a variety of experience levels and career paths. Career panelists are asked to speak for 5 – 10 minutes about their education, subsequent career path, and how they made their career decisions. We then provide a moderated Q&A session with the panelists. Afterward, panelists are split up at round tables around the room so that small groups of students can meet with the panelists they are most interested in to discuss careers in more detail.

Total event length: 3 hours, including a working lunch. Our students travel to SERC for this event, so it’s a day-long trip.

Six weeks before the event we reach out to potential panelists to inquire about their availability and interest to participate. We seek a diverse panel with diversity captured in career path, gender, age, ethnicity, etc. so that students are introduced to people like themselves and can relate to the panelists. We gather panelists from our local sets of contacts, suggestions from previous panelists, and the interests of the students. In recent years, we have hosted federal administrators and program staff, a Smithsonian program manager, extension agents, a post-graduate research and staffing fellows, research technicians, non-profit leaders, Knauss/AAAS fellows, and environmental consultants. Our recruitment success rate is about 50%.

For each panelist, we solicit a one paragraph bio which we use to assemble a program for the event. We also offer them an opportunity to share a handout (electronic or print) with the students.

Two weeks before the event, we confirm our working lunch/catering order. Since this is a day-long event for many of our students, a catered lunch is a necessity (and it eases the roundtable discussions).

A week before the event we provide directions, agenda, and bios to all panelists as well as honorarium information, if appropriate. We also provide an agenda and panelist biographies and contact information to the students and encourage them to come ready to ask questions of the panelists. We also make name tent cards for each of the panelists.

We follow up the event with panelist thank you letters, administering honorarium payments, and an informal evaluation of the program from the student participants from all institutions (survey monkey).