

# EcoCareer Conference 2017 Follow-Up Questions

## PANEL I (CREDENTIALS):

1. I believe USGBC is such a major factor in the future of city infrastructure. In Florida, its biodiversity has been drastically changing along with sea level rise and it is rarely addressed or integrated into the architectural design industry. As a recent architecture graduate (Go Blue), I strongly believe understanding people is fundamentally important and integrating the natural environment can be meaningful to harmonize relationships. Do you have any advice for a young professional in the architecture/planning industry on how to approach and make a difference in green building in an area where it is not as prominent?

**Jaime Van Mourik:** Get involved at the local level. USGBC Florida is a great place to start for your region. There are USGC local communities through the U.S. which host emerging professional groups. Network with local professionals and get involved in projects to build skills and your resume.

2. What is the cost for the LEED credential?

**Jaime Van Mourik:** Information on the credentials may be found at:  
<http://www.usgbc.org/credentials>

3. Are there any specific companies on the east coast you would recommend for internships?

**Jaime Van Mourik:** Most nonprofit organizations host internships including USGBC

4. What are your thoughts about the sustainable MBA programs offered?

**Jaime Van Mourik:** Business schools are amongst the professional programs leading the effort to integrate sustainability into their academic programs. When looking at schools always try to speak to current students and if possible find alum.

5. What are the jobs in the construction sector? Are they mostly working for construction contractors or for specific environmental companies?

**Jaime Van Mourik:** There are positions available throughout the building industry. Look for companies who have a commitment to sustainability, talk about their sustainable practices and look for individuals with credentials such as the LEED Green Associate.

6. How does one in a career change trajectory break into the eco-sustainability field?

**Jaime Van Mourik:** It's all about positioning yourself to be able to "sell" your knowledge and skills to a prospective employer and show how your expertise and talent will support the company's goals and mission. You don't need a degree in sustainability to have a green job.

It's about operating from a sustainable mindset. Education yourself, demonstrate your knowledge through certificates, credentials and badges.

## PANEL II (STEPPING STONES):

1. Thank you Ms. Rumley. This was all very helpful information as a first generation graduate and a person of color. Being connected to a "sponsor" is actually the first time I have heard about this term in this way. How would you recommend meeting someone like this if you no longer live in an area of your graduated university?

**MaKara Rumley:** A sponsor is not chosen based on location, it is an organic relationship with someone that you can meet anywhere.

2. I focused on raising a family before pursuing a career. I have multiple volunteer experiences and leadership roles; however, I do not employment history. The college I attend does not require adult students to participate in internships. I graduate this May. What advice can you give to older graduates?

**MaKara Rumley:** I took 10 years off from my career to raise a family so I understand that sacrifice. Be very intentional about what you want to do. I started working part-time which transitioned into the full-time role that launched my current career. It's all about relationships, so build your network such that the person that gives you a shot doesn't care about employment history because they have confidence that you can do the job.

3. What was your starting salary at GreenLaw as a lawyer?

**MaKara Rumley:** The starting salary was \$45,000, peanuts.

4. MaKara said something I missed about skills missing among the internships, would like to hear more.

**MaKara Rumley:** Basic work quality, proofreading, and communications skills were often lacking.

5. What are relevant career paths between an undergraduate degree and entering an environmental law program?

**MaKara Rumley:** Anything pertaining to research, activism, and social justice.

6. I currently serve as an AmeriCorps volunteer demonstrating an option of choosing to serve our nation while gaining experience in an area I would like to pursue for a career. My main question is when do you know is the right time to make the next step into where you want to be within your career field?

**Capri St. Vil:** Great question. My feeling is that you are always adding on and developing the pieces as well as assessing that will ultimately make you a well-rounded "producer" within your career field, so with that said it is in a sense always the right time. That internship,

volunteer opportunity, job opportunity will provide you with key information/learning in determining your next steps. What is most important, to me, is the acquisition of skills and knowledge, which will then ultimately assist you in better defining your path. Also, there are always different directions that you can go in your path, but ultimately I think that you should look at your overall interests and philosophy in guiding you.

## PANEL III (GETTING HIRED):

1. Does GM offer grad school reimbursement or do you all know any companies that invest in their employees?

**Bridget Burnell:** Yes. There is an internal program for tuition reimbursement to employees furthering their education in a curriculum that will help in their individual growth and development respective to their career path.

2. What credentials does GM look for when hiring? Would the EcoLeader project-based leadership credential NWF awards to High School/College students and young professionals, for example, be of relevance when hiring? LEED? ISSP?

**Bridget Burnell:** Anything that sets a candidate apart from others is valuable, so yes, EcoLeader and other environmental or sustainability certifications are excellent additions for resume building. Certified Hazardous Materials Manager (CHMM) certification is one of the key credentials we look for in our environmental professionals.

3. To what extent is GM allocating sustainability resources beyond renewable energy for facilities and manufacturing by committing to producing vehicles not reliant on fossil fuels?

**Bridget Burnell:** We invest in hybrid electric vehicles, plug-in electric vehicles and fuel-cell vehicles. Our next-generation Chevrolet Volt demonstrates the technological progress that can be made in range, which is the result of significant investment in capabilities for electric batteries, motors and power controls, as well as strategic partnerships. These investments also help lower the cost of building, owning and operating an EV. The all-electric Chevrolet Bolt EV takes us a step further in electrification as an attainable technology for a variety of customers. Fuel-cell technology is another area we invest in. We have a fleet of fuel-cell powered Chevrolet Equinox SUVs and have achieved significant fuel-cell cost improvements. We partner with Honda for ongoing development of fuel-cell technology and are co-testing fuel-cell propulsion with other strategic partners. These technologies are an intrinsic part of our mission to transform transportation in order to meet the evolving mobility needs of our customers, while helping solve some of the world's most complex challenges.

4. How do you get into working on sustainability programs for large corporations if you do not yet have 10-15 years of industry experience?

**Bridget Burnell:** Networking is a great way to meet corporate sustainability leaders and share your credentials, passion, and interests. Attending some of the highly regarded sustainability conferences held each year is a good way to broaden your own perspective while making key contacts. Be bold, introduce yourself, share your accomplishments, ideas,

and goals. If there is a specific company you're interested in, do some research first. Know something about their current sustainability programs and maybe even suggest some opportunities. Leverage your personal and professional strengths, regardless of the background, and highlight how you stand out as a leader in this space.

5. How do you think we as individuals, citizens, or professionals can encourage other businesses to increase their sustainability efforts? How can we start that conversation with them efficiently?

**Bridget Burnell:** One way is to start with what you see they are doing right. This allows the business representative to know you are genuine in your interest and appreciate the efforts made. It will make them more open to the conversation and help to avoid a defensive position as you raise issues of potential concern or make recommendations. Consider starting this part of the conversation with phrases such as "Have you considered..." or "What are your thoughts on the impacts from...". This allows the business representative to lead with their comments - perhaps they are working on an issue but have not discussed it publicly, or perhaps there are complexities to a situation that may provide greater perspective. Listen to what they have to say, and carry the conversation from there. Make it a respectful dialogue versus an accusatory tone in discussion.

6. How can experienced career changers find jobs in government? Avoiding ageism...

**Michael Gale:** The government is not allowed to discriminate based on age and a suite of demographic factors. I can think of a number of instances where experienced career professionals come into government later in their career. Certain government programs tend to higher outside of government where the desired skill sets are not commonly found in entry-level positions in that organization. For the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this includes fields such as technology management, finance, engineering, and communications. We also sometimes recruit for program manager positions from nongovernment organizations. A hiring preference, such as a veteran's preference, can be helpful when competing with other candidates outside of government.

7. Do you see those pathways positions opening up? They seem to be slightly stalled as compared to ten years ago.

**Michael Gale:** The proportion of available Pathways positions depends on the occurrence of retirements and the general increase or decrease in the agencies' workforces. Personally, I do see positions continuing to open up as individuals retire. For the federal hiring freeze (which is only 90 days and typical of Administration transitions), exemptions were made for Pathways and Presidential Management Fellow (PMF) positions (see more information in this [article from Government Executive](#) magazine). I will say that they are extremely competitive and highly dependent on available vacancies and interested managers who chose to use the Pathways program to fill a vacancy.

8. The Recent Graduate federal positions aren't exempted from the current hiring freeze, right?

**Michael Gale:** The application of the Recent Graduates program (learn more on this [web page from USAJobs.gov](#)) varies widely by agency, so you would need to check with each agency's guidance. Since Recent Graduates is part of Pathways, my understanding is that the hiring freeze does not apply to those appointments (see response to question above), but

I bet that many agencies are not choosing to announce Recent Graduate positions given the current uncertainty in federal hiring.

9. What advice might you have for someone who has already graduated with a BS and is looking to shift focus to wildlife biology/conservation?

**Michael Gale:** This is a great question. I think this is highly dependent on the candidate's educational background and interests. If you graduated with a B.S. in Finance and want to switch to conservation, considering applying for an entry-level finance position at a conservation agency, and then take training and/or classes in wildlife biology through your employer (I've seen this happen a number of times with early career professionals). If you can apply your interests to conservation work opportunities (e.g., volunteering, internships, etc.), those experiences can be a valuable way to switch careers because they build skills and show your commitment. One of the more obvious answers is to go to graduate school in wildlife biology/conservation if you meet the admission requirements for those programs. I will admit that wildlife conservation is an increasingly technical field, and so it can be difficult to qualify in a competitive field against other candidates with more technical training and experience, but don't get frustrated - keep working at it! There are hundreds of success stories for this kind of path (and all of them are very different).

10. What programs are available to learn technical skills such as GIS?

**Michael Gale:** If you're affiliated with a university or employer, check with your campus or human capital resources. I did not have any GIS training from my studies in wildlife ecology, but I was lucky enough to take some courses through work from the National Conservation Training Center ([www.fws.gov/training](http://www.fws.gov/training)). ERSI is the leading organization for GIS and they have a fairly robust training program (Learn more at <https://www.esri.com/training/>). You just have to search through the Internet to find different opportunities. For example, I've also taken advantage of a GeoDesign course from the free instructional website Coursera. The website [www.lynda.com](http://www.lynda.com) is a popular software training website. The Smithsonian teaches a fantastic (and expensive) suite of GIS classes. Unfortunately, you just have to look around and see what you have access to, can afford, would be appropriate, etc.

11. Michael, you have been a part of a number of victories; can you name one you enjoyed? in your conservation career?

**Michael Gale:** What a wonderful question. I think I answered this during the Q&A. I guess I'm curious about the context of the question. I will admit that sometimes a career in conservation can be frustrating. The challenges often seem just too big. And there are fundamental challenges of working for institutions run by biologists lol #justsaying. But I've found that three things keep me going each and every day: 1) the privilege of the work, 2) the values of my colleagues), and 3) the victories, however small that they be. I think the most exciting victories are those that are sustainable and that have growth potential. For example, in the [vision process for the National Wildlife Refuge System](#), it was a huge victory to get an urban component added to the vision. The Urban Wildlife program of the Refuge System has exploded into an exciting, successful, and popular program in the years following the vision. Currently, I am not involved with the Urban Wildlife program at all, but I see its fruits all the time (from at distance) at work, and that's incredibly satisfying to know that I was part of planting the seed for that victorious effort.

12. Which field is the most secure in terms of an eco-career?

**Michael Gale:** for conservation, I think it's definitely careers in the more technical skill sets (e.g., GIS, modeling, conservation design, etc.) and in taxa or ecosystems that have increased demand for positions (think of this as "hot" issues, such as pollinators, climate change, and water). Additionally, the sector you work for matters in terms of security. For example, federal government positions are more secure than most non-government positions, and the workforces of certain organizations tend to be more stable than others. Conduct informational interviews of people who work for the institutions you're interested in to get a sense of their organization culture for hiring and supporting development.

13. What kind of major would you suggest to the person struggling to specialize? What kind of approach should someone take towards keeping a broad range of opportunities open to them?

**Michael Gale:** Learn about the kind of jobs you're interested in, and then find out the educational requirements for those positions. For the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, check out our [fact sheet on education requirements](#). In general, I think the two best traits in educational pedigrees are technicality and diversity. A degree in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation is more impressive than General Biology. Having coursework in a diverse set of applications, from mathematics to social science, is more impressive (to me) than someone who only took environmental science courses. Again, it's highly dependent on the types of positions you're seeking and/or your interest in graduate programs. Don't be afraid to change your mind in college, and don't let your degree define your application and identity. I started in "Zoology" before I realized that "Wildlife Ecology & Conservation" was more appropriate for my interests. I ran out of time before I could fully switch majors, so I only got a minor in "Wildlife Ecology & Conservation," and I can tell you that no one has ever cared about that nuanced difference (even though I panicked about it for years! lol).

14. If you're about to graduate and your internship window is about to close. Do you know of internships that take non students and graduates?

**Michael Gale:** Increasingly, internship programs do not require you to be a student. It's just the nature of the market these days. It's actually really common for students in conservation to "stitch" together internships or contracts usually until graduate school or a more permanent job. To use me as an example, after college I worked the summer in one fellowship, switched organizations (and ended up working three different jobs: two environmental internships and one retail job) for nine months, a contract job that next summer for an animal welfare group, then a one-year fellowship abroad, then a one-year fellowship in government, and then finally graduate school. It was an amazing adventure and diverse suite of experiences that set me up well career-wise. In that time in my life, I was an application machine. For the second round of internships, I sent out over 40 applications and had five or so interviews before I secured an opportunity. You just have to be persistent and strategic.

15. If you have experience through internships and student jobs, can you market these as the 1-2 years of work experience many companies require, and if so how?

**Michael Gale:** Yes. I think the key is to volunteer for more advanced assignments and work during those internship and student-work experiences. At first, you may get a fair amount of

menial work (e.g., filing, editing, etc.). My advice is to be the best d#\$% filer that anyone could imagine. Through your behavior, market yourself as someone who is helpful, resourceful, a hard worker, and easy to work with. Take initiative. Maybe your organization's Intranet is a mess - then fix it. Find problems that need solving. If you successfully leverage your internships, then you can then have your resume and interview responses capture that more substantive work to meet the 1-2 years of work experience required. Also I think organizations get many students who have to "stitch" their disparate experiences together. So let's say you're applying right out of undergraduate school, but you worked while studying and interned every summer. In my mind, that counts as 1 year or so of experience. Different employers have different policies on how to interpret that, though.

16. Is there an effective way to learn more about the small companies that have the green job openings? How do you discover companies that have less name recognition?

**Michael Gale:** for conservation organizations, the smaller groups tend to be more localized. Research and network with the communities that interest you to find out about these smaller organizations.