

Marc J Hershman Award Remarks

Pete August

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I don't get many legitimate emails with "*Congratulations, you have won*" in the subject line. When I started reading Laura Cantral's email with the news that I was the recipient of this wonderful honor, my first thought was "*This is a clever SPAM, when do I get asked for my bank account number.*" To my surprise, there wasn't a pitch for money and I realized "*Oh my God, this is real!*"

The Hershman Award is the highest honor for anyone my profession and I am grateful to the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative for selecting me. I am humbled to be in the company of the past recipients and Professor Hershman.

Some other thanks are in order:

I am grateful to all the students who I work with. They will never realize how much I learn from them.

The University of Rhode Island has been a very exciting platform for graduate and undergraduate student training in coastal and ocean science and policy. My wife Lynn and daughter Ashlynn have been very supportive of my work at the University.

It takes a village to be effective in training students in coastal ecosystem management. I am blessed with incredible colleagues on the URI faculty and the non-academic partners we work with.

I thank the NSF IGERT program for their support of our training in coastal ecosystem management. We just finished a 5-year NSF IGERT award to develop innovative ways to train PhD students to be effective in coastal science and management. We spent the last few months listening to our students to identify what they thought were the most important "*Best Practices*" in Graduate Training.

Here is what we learned:

Communication, communication, communication. To be effective in a multidisciplinary setting you must be able to communicate clearly and persuasively to people outside your discipline and the public.

Short projects and internship experiences outside the academy are game changers. We required our students to work on the front line of coastal ecosystem management with agencies, NGOs, and companies. They did internships and short projects with The Nature Conservancy, the National Park Service, EPA, NOAA, Rhode Island's coastal commission, our distinguished Senator in Washington -- Sheldon Whitehouse, and many many others. These experiences changed the direction of their research and in some cases, changed their career goals. To all of you in the audience who do not work for a University – open your doors to students, you can be a game changer.

Last, our students felt empowered when they realized they were peers with the faculty in the discovery and learning process. In addressing complex, multidisciplinary issues in coastal ecosystems, no one person knows all the geology, biology, chemistry, policies, economics, and social ramifications. The organizational chart gets very flat, very fast. Trust, respect, camaraderie, and a sense of humor go far in gluing teams together.

To close -- 40 years ago, as a sophomore undergraduate at the University of San Diego, I answered a notice from Professor Ross Dingman, my first mentor. He was looking for someone to assist him on an ecological survey of Bolsa Chica Refuge in southern California. After our first field trip I thought – *“Wow, camping, studying interesting animals, visiting interesting places, and working on important environmental issues – count me in!”*

Thoughtful mentoring can change lives. It did for me.

Thank you for honoring me with the Marc J. Hershman Mentoring Award.