EXECUTIVE MASTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES (XMNR)

CLASS OF 2016
STUDENT PROFILES

Each January, a new cohort of professionals begins the Executive Master of Natural Resources (XMNR), an interdisciplinary graduate degree program focusing on leadership for sustainability. The XMNR Class of 2016 includes individuals with extensive experience in business, government, and civil society. Throughout the XMNR program, students collaborate with faculty, peers, and partner organizations on applied research and service learning projects to advance innovative solutions to natural resource management, environmental conservation, and sustainable development challenges.
John Turner is a seasoned project management professional with over 20 years experience in delivering information technology projects in both private industry and federal government markets. His experience includes delivering large budget enterprise level applications, custom software development, and data center maintenance projects. Many of these projects relied on globally distributed resources. Turner has hands-on experience in each phase of the Software Development Lifecycle, communicating effectively with the entire project team and project stakeholders. He excels at bridging the gap between business-oriented and information technology stakeholders. His technical expertise includes data warehousing, business intelligence, team management and development, risk identification and management, and project stakeholder analysis.

Marielsie Avila-Negron has a passion for achieving food security and economic development worldwide. Currently, she is an International Trade Specialist for the Foreign Agricultural Service, USDA. She coordinates U.S. Government interagency policy to support science-based regulations for food safety, animal and plant health through the World Trade Organization and Free Trade Agreement Sanitary and Phytosanitary Committees in South America. Recently, she managed capacity building programs for Africa and Middle East for more than 600 agriculturalists to improve food security and trade. Avila also established public-private partnerships to support rural entrepreneurs in Puerto Rico, and served in Peace Corps’ Senegal as a Health and Development Specialist in the rural Sahel.

Carter Griggs believes future generations should have the freedom and opportunity to enjoy functioning ecosystems. As co-founder of Sustainability Solutions LLC, Carter strives to be an action-oriented on site project developer. This brand new LLC will focus on wildlife habitat enhancement, conservation easements, subsurface rain gardens and retention basins, local dockside oyster float aquaculture, alternative energy inputs, among other things. Griggs hopes to build the LLC with non-profit characteristics spreading awareness of sustainable initiatives and public-private partnerships, as well as, inviting local schools and communities to visit project sites and adopt projects of their own. Carter also wishes to start a Commonwealth Conservation Group, lobbying with research entities and private stakeholders to contract innovative sustainability projects.

Karlee Sipierski is driven by compassion with her personal and career life guided directly by her values. She represents underserved populations through activism, empathy, and program development. For the past two years, She has worked to alleviate poverty in the New River Valley region of Virginia through various organizations such as AmeriCorps VISTA and VT Engage at Virginia Tech. Her experience with AmeriCorps has helped shape her views of poverty and changed her life for the better. She is currently working to merge her desire to empower communities with her passion for sustainability through her pursuit of an XMNR graduate degree. She is interested in both international and domestic work upon graduation. She received her B.A. in Mass Media Communication Studies from Albion College in Albion, MI.

Brandon Hill is a Senior Consultant for Booz Allen Hamilton working on energy projects for the MCIEAST branch of the Regional Energy and Water Advisory Center (REWAC). He analyzes, designs, coordinates, and facilitates energy conservation and renewable energy projects. He also helps clients transition to renewable and more efficient methods of distributing energy and water to their stakeholders. Previously, Hill was the Sustainability Technologies’ Program Chair for Lenoir Community College. Hill also served in the U.S. Navy as a linguist and avionics technician for six years. Hill is a member of the North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association (NCSEA) and North Carolina Association of Environmental Professionals (NCAEP). He received his B.S. in Environmental Management and Technology from North Carolina State University.
Chris Mankey has been educating students in middle school and high school since 1985. His teaching includes but is not limited to: Honors Anatomy and Physiology, AP Biology, AP Environmental Science, and Plant and Soil Science. He is passionate and energetic about education. Preparing for class, he plans both long-term and day-to-day. Problem troubleshooting and solving are challenges that he relishes. Mankey is interested in finding solutions to problems dealing with natural resource sustainability issues. He is looking forward to using his Executive Master of Natural Resources (XMNR) at Virginia Tech as a way to employ his visions, where his ideas can be implemented and he can make a dent on the overuse and misuse of natural resources.

Kara Westerfield is an Environmental Consultant for Booz Allen Hamilton, with three years of Government consulting experience. She currently supports the development of two Environmental and Biological Impact Statement reports through her expertise in environmental science, geology, climate change, and biology. She also has significant experience researching global and regional climate change trends, and conducting and analyzing micro-fossils and stable isotope values. Apart from scientific/technical skills, Westerfield has an aptitude for leadership, public speaking and engagement, and effective management. She is also capable of identifying and analyzing technical, scientific concepts and effectively translating the language into clear, comprehensible presentations or reports. She has a B.S. from the University of Mary Washington in Geology.

Adam Doering has a proven history of dreaming big while delivering results. Years of leading soldiers in combat and garrison operations have honed his leadership, critical thinking, problem solving and management skills. His academic highlights include honor graduate of the Intelligence Community’s (IC) premier Geospatial Intelligence (GEOINT) course, and Commandant’s List recognition in the military’s Advanced Leaders Course. His professional accolades consist of many awards for superior performance in combat and garrison. He graduated with honors from American Military University with a BA in Intelligence Operations, and holds an MBA from George Mason University.

Meerim Shakirova is a passionate development practitioner. She is always looking for an opportunity for both personal growth and making a difference on other people’s lives. Meerim has been working on various projects as a sector expert, analyst and consultant in development of policies and practices related to environment, climate change, land tenure, forestry and natural resource management, and promoting these concepts through a sustainable development and growth context. Meerim has broad international experiences, working in international and national development agencies, such as the World Bank in Kyrgyzstan, Asian Development Bank in the Philippines, UN ESCAP in Thailand, UN ECE in Switzerland, and others.

Matthew Powers is a results-oriented leader with a versatile and experienced background in the regulated power industry. He is good at working under pressure in big business energy production and transportation while adjusting to ever changing work environments to meet natural gas demands. Powers has a strong customer service background, positively representing large energy producers and customers while gaining company recognition with proven ability to streamline daily activities through integration of automated systems of record. Knowledgeable in policy and Government affairs regarding tariffs, Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. He has an MBA from Averett University and aspires to gain expertise to eventually manage natural capital and advance sustainability initiatives while maintaining maximum profitability.
Jamie Brunkow is the Lower James Riverkeeper at the James River Association, overseeing the organization’s pollution monitoring, advocacy and outreach in the watershed east of Richmond, Virginia. He has worked in the non-profit sector for six years focusing his career on water quality issues and developing strategies to protect local waterways. Brunkow has served in many professional capacities including: policy research and analysis, ecological monitoring, regulation and compliance, habitat restoration, environmental education, community outreach, and stakeholder engagement. Brunkow received a B.S. in Biological Sciences from Virginia Tech, and is an avid paddler and backpacker.

Sarah Boltwala-Mesina dives into dumpsters to find solutions to social, economic and environmental injustice. An advocate for Zero Waste, she believes that sustainable development can be achieved through the power of collaboration and resilience of individual enterprise. Sarah has an MBA from the University of Notre Dame and a charter from the CFA Institute. After working for almost a decade in finance and investments, she founded a non-profit to reduce, repurpose and rethink waste. Sarah is seeking professional opportunities that apply innovative market based models and collaborative institutional mechanisms to eliminate waste, create livelihoods and ensure corporate sustainability.

Aaron Stern helps connect solutions to environmental challenges. In his tenure with the U.S. Geological Survey, he has focused on improving the bureau’s environmental stewardship by supporting the implementation of sustainability initiatives. With expertise in the Environmental Management System methodology and practice, he has helped to improve the mitigation of environmental impacts and to enhance environmental performance. Stern received a Bachelor of Science in Integrated Science and Technology from James Madison University. He seeks opportunities to leverage sustainable technologies and socioeconomically-valuable practices in global and local venues. He is inspired and eager to help propel organizations beyond regulatory compliance and into a sustainably-developed future.

Kim Morrow has recently graduated magna cum laude from the Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech in management, focusing on entrepreneurship, diversity, and international studies. Her training and education range from human resources in manufacturing, consulting for Floyd Yoga Jam and The Mayapple School, to working with Long and Foster Real Estate and Attimo Winery. However, her passions are about creating solutions for businesses and community problems alike, while protecting the environment through sustainable methods to create shared value for all stakeholders. In her spare time she inundates friends, family, and colleagues with articles on the environment and social injustices, which inspire and inform, via social media.

John Myers is “saving the world one stream at a time” as the District Manager at the Pittsylvania Soil and Water Conservation district in Virginia. He provides adult and youth educational programs about conservation, agriculture and natural resources, and administers a cost share program to assist agricultural producers in the implementation of Best Management Practices. Since beginning with the district eight years ago, Myers’ projects have excluded livestock from thirty miles of streams, stabilized over twelve thousand acres of erodible cropland, and installed multiple livestock waste handling facilities. He has previous experience in the construction and manufacturing industry. Myers has a Bachelor’s degree in Agriculture with a minor in Economics from Ferrum College. He is also a certified nutrient management plan writer.
Jeff Graber is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, and currently serving as the Headquarters Deputy Director of Operations for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), a Department of Defense field activity that includes a 4700 member, nationwide volunteer base. He has over 8 years of experience directing government operations involving strategic planning, training, volunteer support, budget control, procurement and federal contract management. Graber is a leader, supervisor, trusted advisor, respectful straight talker, subcommittee facilitator, volunteer coordinator, process efficiency visionary, and solid performer who believes in rooting out waste in order to achieve more streamlined results. He hopes to pursue a challenging position in federal government or corporate America addressing natural resources and sustainability issues.

Caitlin Edenfield is a graduate of Virginia Tech’s Landscape Architecture program and has been working to combine her passion for the landscape with her drive to educate and meet the needs of communities. Edenfield’s senior thesis involved a series of art installations that evaluated the impact of temporary environmental art, one of which served as a catalyst for protecting an 11-acre old growth forest. She also received the Stanley Abbott award for her thesis and the VT Faculty Book Award for her dedication to the Landscape Architecture program and the larger community. Since then, Edenfield has helped to protect over 2,000 acres of land along with managing two conservation easement transactions and four fee simple transactions as the AmeriCorps Land Protection Associate at the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy.

Timothy O’Brien is an environmental analyst for the U.S. Coast Guard serving as a subject matter expert on maritime regulations. He has seven years of experience in this capacity, ensuring that new regulations are compliant with the National Environmental Policy Act and other major federal and state environmental laws. These efforts require environmental studies, interagency consultations, and public outreach before a regulation is enacted. O’Brien enjoys being exposed to a wide variety of environmental issues that affect marine ecosystems and thrives in the collaborative environment of regulatory work with professionals from different technical backgrounds.

Brittney McClain is an innovative thinker, persuasive speaker, and effective writer. She is a talented attorney with experience in commercial litigation, international trade law, environmental and energy policy and law, and government relations. She specializes in trade remedies and represents diverse, foreign clients before the International Trade Administration, the Department of Commerce, and the Court of International Trade. McClain seeks opportunities to expand her practice and to represent U.S. and international clients with interests in renewable energy, food security, carbon trading, and environmental regulation.

Brian Indre helped open and now manages a small business bike shop, which has been voted best bike shop in northern Virginia two years in a row by Virginia Living Magazine. He plays many roles including mechanic and inventory manager. He also orders merchandise, meets with sales reps, manages the local race team, and keeps the social media outlets and website up to date. Indre is an advocate for biking as an alternative means of transportation, including more bike lanes for bike commuters. He is engaged in issues that plague the environment and threatens future generations. Indre wants to be more involved in the change and hopes that this degree will help him learn leadership abilities, make contacts with those who share his passion and concerns for the environment, and gain knowledge of how sustainability can make the future brighter.
Spencer Rosborough is a supply chain professional with over 15 years of experience, nine of which have been in a consultancy and advisory capacity. His area of specialty included strategic sourcing and procurement operational strategy. He thrives on working in cross-functional teams and forgoing a path with people from all walks of life. He enjoys learning about the various functions within an organization, collaborating with multiple cross-functional people and exploring opportunities to improve an organization. In October 2014 he decided go back to school, dive deep into learning about global sustainability, and apply that knowledge to his career in supply chain management. He also works part time at a cystic fibrosis/lung transplant clinic and volunteering with various organizations.

Carrie Hatcher is a passionate Waste and Recycling Consultant for Virginia Waste Services (VWS), a locally owned and operated small business that has been serving the Greater Richmond area with waste and recycling services for over 30 years. In her short term with VWS, Hatcher has maintained a 95% retention rate with a clear focus on building and developing relationships through attentiveness, dedication to her clients and a devout work ethic. Hatcher has worked for various non-profits and corporations with a focus on sustainability, solid waste, energy efficiency, environmental education and community outreach. She has also received her Building Analyst certification through the Building Performance Institute. She enjoys the thrill of challenge, thrives under pressure and welcome obstacles in unchartered territory.

Ian Phillips is a researcher, consultant, policy analyst, and all-around utility man on issues of sustainability, specializing in water use, agricultural lands use, and climate change. He is currently consulting a Sub-Saharan African water-engineering NGO (ROCK Blue) through its incorporation process. His extensive experience in the MENA and Sub-Saharan Africa regions includes environmental policy and development work, especially in developing state population growth and livelihood/SME creation. Phillips has also served domestically with City Year/Americorps, providing educational interventions and mentoring to underprivileged youth in post-hurricane Louisiana and South Central Los Angeles. He is excited to learn more about navigating sustainability policy in a large corporate structure or through governmental/IGO structures.

Sonya Lambkin is passionate, energetic, driven, personable and curious, each of which defines her approach to her professional and personal life. These characteristics help her deliver results as a Consumer Safety Officer at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)’s Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM). At CVM she protects human and animal health by creating, implementing, and enforcing policies and regulations related to animal food safety. Lambkin thrives in diverse teams and is particularly energized when tackling complex challenges in order to implement effective solutions. Through her various roles at FDA, she has lead teams through increasingly complicated challenges and has always surpassed expected results. Her authentic passion for helping others, both man and animal, manifests in her enthusiasm for conservation and sustainable global development.

Nick Harscher is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP) with 12 years of National Security experience and currently serves as the Executive Officer of a large contract supporting the U.S. Government’s (USG) counterterrorism mission. He loves leading teams, tackling complex problems, and creating efficiencies by designing better systems. Harscher believes growing environmental and demographic pressures will significantly impact the global marketplace and that companies strategically positioned to engage in these dynamic future markets will lead their industries and shape the future. His goal is to focus on the business case for sustainability and compete for a position with one of these forward-leaning organizations.
MIKE BARANCEWICZ has worked as both a supplier and an end user of energy. He has experience with conservation program implementation and advocates for environmentally friendly practices. He graduated from Old Dominion University with a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering Technology, and began working for Dominion Virginia Power. He subsequently became Energy Manager for Loudoun Government and moved to Loudoun Public Schools. He is a Certified Energy Manager with the Association of Energy Engineers and serves on the Board for the AEE-National Capital Chapter. He is a Board member for the Virginia Governmental Purchasing Association (VEPGA) and served as chair for their Energy Efficiency & Conservation Committee for three years. Mike aspires to increase his capacity to implement transformation in rapidly changing environments.

GIANNINA DIMAQIO IENCO has 14 years of environmental policy development, regulatory compliance, and enforcement experience. Ms. Ienco supports the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Ocean Service (NOS) as the Environmental Compliance Coordinator in the Office of the Assistant Administrator. Previously, she worked with the Air Force providing National Environmental Policy Act compliance support for the implementation of their Environmental Impact Analysis Program. Ms. Ienco is a publicly elected Director on her area Soil and Water Conservation District Board. She plans to utilize tools learned from the XMNR program to become a community leader in sustainability, bringing together her knowledge and passion for the environment to solve local resources issues and promote conservation.

JOE PLUMMER is an experienced nonprofit leader in the National Capital Region. He is Founder and CEO of The Three Birds Foundation, a nonprofit that works with low-income K-12 schools on renewable energy initiatives. Previously, Joe was a data analyst consulting for state and federal government agencies. This background allowed him to create a data-driven, high performance organization and influence education at a high level. He has also worked with the community to revitalize The DC STEM Fair and launch The DC STEM Network, as well as worked with The Solar Foundation and other renewable energy related partners to launch The National Solar Schools Consortium. Joe holds a Bachelors in Economics from Virginia Tech and an MBA from Babson College. He is passionate about design, energy, social entrepreneurship, and education.

Leah TIRPAK is an international development professional with AECOM International Development, serving as Senior Grants Manager on the USAID Southern Africa Trade Hub program. She oversees the management of 13 strategic partnership grants focused on transferring agricultural skills and knowledge from South African firms to organizations in Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia. Previously she focused on USAID, DOS, NATO, and UN business development efforts, supporting the development of programs focused on rural water and sanitation, agriculture, climate change adaptation, and conflict resiliency and stabilization. Her experience overseas includes travel in Africa and the Middle East. She is passionate about increasing developing communities’ access to, and the appropriate management of, foundational natural resources, as well as behavior change.

Chase Allred grew up on a horse farm in a small, rural community in Southern Utah, giving him a unique perspective on the implications of natural resource management. It also taught him that hard work and determination are necessary for success. He worked for the U.S. Forest Service for nine years, gaining experience in multiple fields such as: Wildlife, Fisheries, Wildland Firefighting, Range, Forestry, Botany, and Recreation. He hopes to continue his work in the government and aims to bring in a new perspective through his participation in the XMNR Program. He received a Bachelors in Wildlife Science from Utah State University, where he participated in a research project with the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis on the effects habitat fragmentation has on amphibian survival. He hopes to gain knowledge to run a sustainable horse farm.