

11-13-2018

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## Recommended Citation

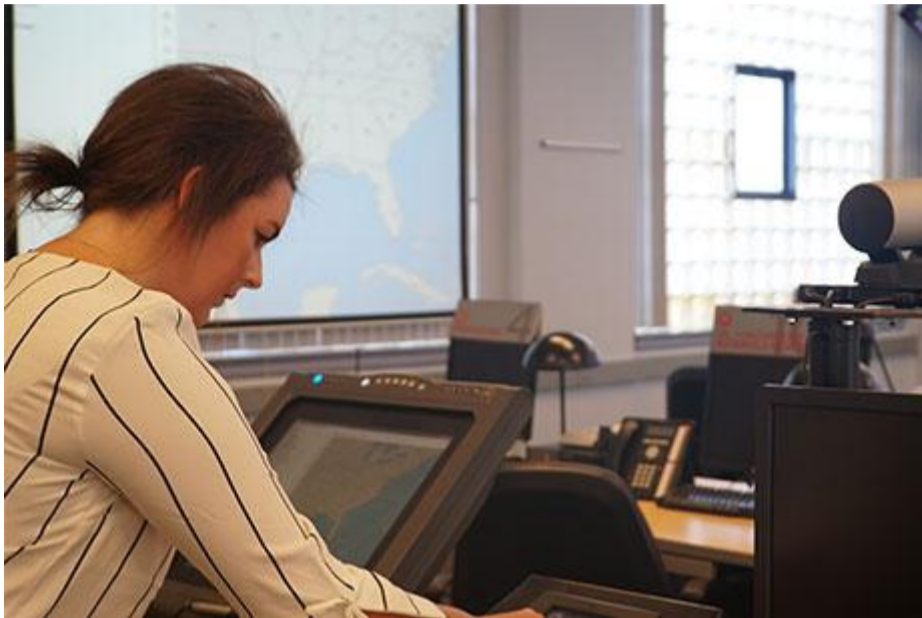
Dell'Agnese, Courtney, "Preparing for Any Emergency: A Student's Internship at the Providence Emergency Management Agency" (2018). *Featured News Story*. 321.  
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# Preparing for Any Emergency: A Student's Internship at the Providence Emergency Management Agency

Public Health major Emma Feeley gets real-world training on keeping communities safe



November 13, 2018 | By Courtney Dell'Agnes '19

**PROVIDENCE, R.I.** – No two days at [Providence Emergency Management Agency \(PEMA\)](#) headquarters on Charles Street are ever alike, according to senior public health major Emma Feeley.

At times Feeley sits at her desk plugging away at preparedness plans, or she's in the Emergency Operations Center updating resources for city personnel to prepare them for when an emergency strikes. Another day finds her checking tire pressures on [PEMA](#) vehicles and making sure all garage equipment is working properly for when an emergency presses them into service. Some days she's attending meetings of the Local Emergency Planning Committee or assisting in training courses – like one called, ["Until Help Arrives"](#) – for both first responders and community members.

"I'll go into work one day to get something done, but that's just not the way life works so you have to be really flexible," Feeley said. "I'm never sitting in one place for too long and it's always a little something different, which is fun."

Prepared for Anything



As part of her public health capstone project, Feeley is interning with PEMA, working with emergency service and community personnel to mitigate against, prepare for, respond to and recover from natural and man-made disasters. While this line of work is critical to the health of communities, it may not be the first job to come to mind when people picture public health careers.

When we think of “public health,” images of doctors and nurses, or perhaps disease outbreaks, flood our brains. But that only brushes the surface of a complex, integrated field that promotes health and safety for the general public.

According to [Professor Marybeth MacPhee](#), public health’s larger purpose is to keep entire populations healthy through a multitude of channels including health education, social and behavioral determinants, administration, management and more.

“Public health is important because it works to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to live a healthy life,” MacPhee said. “It identifies the forces that threaten human health and works to protect whole populations from those threats.”

Careers in public health can vary, and at Roger Williams University students like Feeley have the opportunity to choose from three distinct paths within two majors in public health – a Bachelor of Science in Public Health, or the Public Health Bachelor of Arts in either Health Policy and Administration or Community and Health Equity.

With public health becoming a rapidly growing profession, RWU has created a comprehensive, interdisciplinary [public health major](#). Students in the rigorous undergraduate major take graduate-level courses that teach them skills and knowledge that prepare them for internships, graduate school or to step right into entry-level positions.

“It’s a great major for students interested in health but don’t want to be clinical practitioners,” MacPhee said. “You can do a lot related to health working with communities, coming more from the policy or community relations side.”

Feeley, who selected the Public Health Bachelor of Arts in Health Policy and Administration program, finds the policy side of the major most interesting. Getting to work behind the scenes to prepare the public is her favorite part of her PEMA internship.

“We’re constantly training people, getting them up to speed and informing the public on what they can do to better prepare for any incident or disaster,” Feeley said. “People think you only see FEMA during a recovery. But the mitigation part and the preparedness part is what gets you there and what gets less fatalities, what gets resources going and gets boots on the ground sooner.”

While she’s getting real-world training with PEMA this semester, Feeley has already been active within the local community, both on and off campus.

Through her public health classes, Feeley got involved in the [Food Recovery Network at RWU](#) and has grown into the club’s Co-President for her senior year. In partnership with Bon Appétit, Food Recovery Network takes daily leftovers from RWU’s dining halls and brings it to shelters in the surrounding Bristol community.

“It’s good, healthy food that we’re bringing to these shelters and what we bring Monday night, goes in a kid’s lunchbox on Tuesday,” Feeley said. “Knowing that kids are not only getting a lunch, but are getting food that’s coming from us that otherwise would have been thrown away is so rewarding.”

It’s a simple concept but Feeley says she loves being able to go into the community and provide people in need with nutritious meals. And the club’s data tracking has an even larger scope. It helps Bon Appétit waste less money and food while also eliminating carbon-dioxide emissions into the atmosphere.

This year she became a [Hassenfeld Student Leadership Fellow](#), acting as community partner liaison for [Feinstein Community Connections Day](#) and training site leaders and RWU members to contribute a day of service among 33 local community organizations. While it’s one day of service, Feeley says, the impact remains within the community for a much longer time.

Sitting at her desk at PEMA headquarters, armed with a binder full of resources and notes spelled out in a multitude of acronyms, Feeley is confident that her time with the agency and her public health studies will prepare her not only for emergency incidents, but also to take care of the community in any way that is needed.

"It's important to recognize why things are going on and how it's affecting people," Feeley said. "And that's what public health people do. We work with the community and find the best way to communicate what they need to know."

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