



Donald Rodriguez (1951-Present)

Professor and Chair, Environmental Science
and Resource Management Program
California State University, Channel Islands

“Having a successful career is really about finding one’s passion and pursuing that passion throughout the life course. Mentoring students has been all about cultivating their passion for the natural world into legitimate career directions. My most successful students have been the one’s that combine their avocation and vocation into a lifelong pursuit. The environmental field is more a way of life than a career direction. It’s not extremely lucrative but it has intrinsic rewards.” Donald Rodriguez, 2005.

Overview

Dr. Donald Rodriguez is a professor and chair of the Environmental Science and Resource Management Program at California State University, Channel Islands. He currently teaches courses natural resource management, environmental history, and various field based courses in Latin America. He has also published numerous papers on visitor needs assessment, human-wildlife interactions, and park visitor management. In addition he currently serves as a consultant to the Belize Protected Area Conservation Trust, and works closely with the National Park Service in Ventura County. Some of his publications include:

- [Lafferty, Kevin, Rodriguez, Donald A. and Chapman, Angela \(2013\). Temporal and spatial variation in bird and human use of beaches in southern California. SpringerPlus Journal, vol. 2\(38\): 1-24](#)
- [Rodriguez, Donald A. "Embedded research in gateway STEM courses as a best practice for retaining underrepresented students." Paper delivered at 10th Biennial Conference on University Education in Natural Resources. Auburn University, Auburn AL, Mar 14, 2014.](#)
- [Clarke, Tracylee, Rodriguez, Donald A. and Alamillo, Jose. \(2012\). "Engaging Non-traditional Audiences with National Park Programs: Opportunities for Voice." with T. Clarke and J. Alamillo. Paper delivered at Under Western Skies Environment, Community and Culture in North America. Banff, Alberta Canada, Oct 13.](#)
- [Rodriguez, Donald A., Pacheco, Pilar \(2011\). Transformative Education: Creating a generation of environmental leaders. The Journal for Civic Commitment, vol. 16 \(1\): 1-13.](#)

- Rodriguez, Donald A., Chapman, Angela, and Cartwright, Rachel. (2011). A Shoreline Study of Coastal Birds in Ventura County. Technical Report # BOEMRE 2010-024. U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation, and Enforcement, Pacific OCS Region. Camarillo, CA. 91 pp. July.

This interview was conducted in 2015.

Early Life and Career

Donald Rodriguez was born in 1951 to Emanuel and Nartissa Rodriguez. Their family lived in San Leandro, California, near the San Francisco Bay area. Rodriguez learned of the natural world at a young age, as each summer his family would take a two-week camping trip to Yosemite National Park. These early trips left an indelible mark on him and gave him an appreciation for natural settings and the environment.

Rodriguez graduated with a bachelor's degree in wildlife biology from San Jose State University in 1977. He followed this with a master's degree in environmental education from Cal State East Bay in 1985. He completed his education with a doctorate in human dimensions of natural resources from Colorado State University in 1996.

Throughout his undergraduate studies, Rodriguez worked as a seasonal naturalist at the East Bay Regional Park District. As part of his responsibilities, he gave interpretive talks to visitors. He also worked as a seasonal wildlife biologist with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). These early positions reinforced his interest in the environmental field. His career in academia began in 1992 as a graduate student. Upon completion of his doctorate in 1996, he was appointed as a faculty member in the College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University.

Rodriguez is currently a faculty member and the Chair for the Environmental Science and Resource Management program at California State University, Channel Islands (CSUCI) in Camarillo. He credits his advancement to the positive media attention he has received as well as his publication record.

Importance of Mentoring to Career

A host of people have guided Rodriguez throughout his career. He acknowledges Ron Stecker, a faculty member in the entomology department at San Jose State University, for sparking his interest in ecological topics. His master's advisor also served as a great influence in the realm of environmental education and interpretation. Rodriguez's doctoral advisor at Colorado State University assisted him with networking by introducing him to key individuals who worked in parks and protected lands. Overall, his career has been filled with people who have helped guide him and intensify his interest in pursuing a career in the environmental field. He says, "I've continued to grow through these mentors...They came during critical points in my development... [they] helped to keep me moving during my academic career towards environmental science."

Mentoring Others

Having benefited from the guidance of mentors, Rodriguez understands the importance of mentoring others. He helped to develop the Colorado Youth Naturally Program in Denver and Fort Collins in the early 1990s. He also created the educational component for the Youth in Natural Resources Program for the State of Colorado. In addition, he worked with the Hispanic Environmental Coalition in Washington, D.C. to assist other Hispanic organizations in higher education to become more interested in environmental affairs. He gives the following advice to individuals interested in a career in the environmental field, "The environmental field is more a way of life than a career direction. If [individuals] have [environmental science] as a personal interest, they'll be successful in terms of finding a niche in the environmental arena."

Challenges

While he can recall more than one low point in his career, not being acknowledged as a teacher scholar in a large research oriented institution, numerous failed grant attempts, and more than his share of revise and resubmit suggestions, he believes all of these experiences have brought him to this point in his career. Finding the right fit academically is one of the most important decisions for those starting a life in higher education. Finding his way to CSU Channel Islands, a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), was an outgrowth of him trying to "fit in" at a research oriented institution where many junior faculty failed to navigate their probationary periods. It's interesting to note that most of these junior faculty were minorities and women, and the demands of securing external funding and maintaining a zealous record of publication isn't a particularly good fit for those that are equally interested in good teaching, mentoring students, and community engagement (which are often the motivation that drives minority faculty to higher education).

Achievements

Rodriguez's career contains many positive experiences. "My most glowing achievement has been the opportunity to work with so many gifted and talented students over the years. Playing a small role in their career development and being that pivotal mentor for others has allowed me to see my career come full circle. Personally, my work at Channel Islands has provided numerous career highlights that include being the "founding chair" of a new program at a new institution, Creating an environmental science and resource oriented curriculum that reaches a new urban audience has been very gratifying for me. While this experience has provided awards and recognition, professional opportunities for international involvement, and more than my share of media attention, seeing my students take their place in the environmental field has been my crowning achievement. Changing the complexion of the environmental community one student at a time has been a slow process but I'm confident that the seeds I've sown, and those of many of my colleagues recognized in this MELDI publication, will increase exponentially in the next generation."

For More Information

Phone: 805-437-8494

Email: Donald.Rodriguez@csuci.edu

Professional Website: ciapps.csuci.edu/directory/Search?q=donald.rodriguez