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Sarah Huddle
Old Dominion University

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Jessica Whitehead Named Joan P. Brock Endowed Executive Director for Old Dominion University's Institute for Coastal Adaptation and Resilience (ICAR)

February 25, 2021

By Sarah Huddle

Old Dominion University announced that Jessica Whitehead has been named the Joan P. Brock Endowed Executive Director of the Institute for Coastal Adaptation and Resilience (ICAR).

Whitehead joins ODU from the North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR), where she served as its first chief resilience officer. Her new appointment marks another chapter in ODU's decade-long leadership in coastal resilience research, education and outreach.

Launched in 2019, ICAR provides an interdisciplinary, research-based approach to addressing pressing issues for the regional coastal communities. The combination of a research university in a key coastal area inspired a decade of investment and commitment by ODU, led by President John R. Broderick, to advance fundamental and applied study in the areas of sea-level rise and coastal resilience. This interdisciplinary approach, with its array of immediate real-world application opportunities, was formalized with the launch of ICAR.

"The creation of the Institute for Coastal Adaptation and Resilience marked the culmination of a decade of work and the fulfillment of a vision shared with my late friend and colleague, Dr. Larry Atkinson, with whom I initiated the University's coastal resiliency effort," President Broderick said.

"The appointment of Dr. Whitehead as the Joan P. Brock Endowed Executive Director enables us to build upon Larry's legacy of helping communities threatened by sea-level rise by fostering research,



Jessica Whitehead

leveraging resources, building connections and leading efforts to turn world-class science into global practice."

As part of the innovative collaboration and memorandum of understanding between ICAR and the City of Norfolk, Whitehead will also collaborate closely with the city staff and leadership to use Norfolk as a testbed for resilience policies, strategies and technologies. This partnership will enable ODU faculty to directly connect to the city as a natural lab for innovative technologies and practices and will support applied faculty research and student projects that leverage Old Dominion's strengths in modeling and simulation, economics, engineering and more to build resilience in Norfolk's neighborhoods. ICAR will look to learn from and build upon this partnership to engage additional municipalities and communities throughout the region and beyond.

"We look to Old Dominion University as an integral partner to implement Virginia's Coastal Resilience Master Planning Framework. The hiring of Dr. Jessica Whitehead as the founding director of ICAR is a key step to connecting research with action to build resilience for communities across the commonwealth," said Special Assistant to Gov. Ralph Northam for Coastal Adaptation and Protection Ann Phillips. "In her previous role with the State of North Carolina, Dr. Whitehead was a valuable collaborator as we shared strategies between our two states. I welcome Dr. Whitehead to Virginia and look forward to continued collaborations with her and Old Dominion."

"The City of Norfolk has been hard at work and leading the way in improving coastal resilience and adaptation, and we look forward to working with Jessica Whitehead in her new role," Norfolk Mayor Kenneth C. Alexander added. "Our resilience strategy is now in full swing with major projects underway, including the St. Paul's Transformation Initiative, Ohio Creek Watershed Project and planning and design for the extension of our downtown floodwall. We are pushing the envelope in innovation with collaborative partnerships with Old Dominion University's Institute for Coastal Adaptation and Resilience and we welcome Dr. Whitehead to the team."

President Broderick noted that a debt of gratitude is owed to those who supported the development of ICAR, including Brock, an alumna and longtime supporter of Old Dominion University, whose \$3 million donation helped make ICAR a reality.

"Local and state governments all over America are beyond asking if resilience is important - now they want to know what to do and how to do it," Whitehead said. "We need innovative and collaborative partnerships between universities and governments to answer this question. I'm so excited to be leading ICAR, because ODU and the City of Norfolk are uniquely positioned to set the national standard for implementing coastal resilience and adaptation solutions."

Whitehead earned her Doctor of Philosophy in geography and Master of Science degree in meteorology from The Pennsylvania State University. She also earned a Bachelor of Science degree in physics with a concentration in meteorology from the College of Charleston. Prior to beginning with NCORR in June 2019, she was the coastal communities hazards adaptation specialist for North Carolina Sea Grant, where she assisted coastal users with integrating information about resilience to coastal weather and climate hazards into their decision-making processes.

Whitehead serves on the American Meteorological Society's Board of Outreach and Pre-College Education and the advisory board for the North Carolina State University Climate and Society Masters Program. She is an adjunct lecturer with the Georgetown University emergency and disaster management professional masters' program, where she developed and teaches the climate change in emergency and disaster management course. Until June 2020, Whitehead co-chaired the science and technical advisory committee of the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership. She was a member of the Independent Advisory Committee on Applied Climate and the Sustained National Climate Assessment federal advisory committee.