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InsideODU, Old Dominion University

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February 5, 2015

New Coastal Resilience Director Brings Track Record, Expertise



Emily Steinhilber

While her position is brand-new at Old Dominion University, the work that Emily Steinhilber has been doing in coastal resilience research in Hampton Roads makes her ideally suited to dive right into this important initiative.

Steinhilber, ODU's new Assistant Director for Coastal Resilience Research, has ties to sea level rise projects that go back years. In fact, she helped create the very program she is now helping to guide - the Hampton Roads Sea Level Rise Preparedness and Resilience Intergovernmental Planning Pilot Project.

As the director of the Virginia Coastal Coalition, Steinhilber traveled to Washington, D.C. in 2013 to meet with the White House Council on Environmental Quality. Because President Obama's Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience doesn't include a representative from Hampton Roads, Steinhilber and others, including representatives from the Navy, the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, the City of Norfolk and the Washington, D.C.-based World Resources Institute, hoped to draw attention to the area.

"We went to highlight all of the ongoing work on sea level rise in Hampton Roads," she said. It could not have gone more positively."

That meeting helped lead to the Hampton Roads Intergovernmental Planning Pilot Project, which brings together military, government and community in a "whole of community, whole of government" approach to sea level rise.

Now at Old Dominion, Steinhilber will help further the pilot project's goals, coordinating federal and local initiatives about environmental policy.

Ray Toll, Director of Coastal Resilience Research at the University, said Steinhilber's experience with the issue, and her local contacts, will make her an invaluable contributor to the University-wide sea level rise mitigation effort.

"Emily will be extremely important to our pilot on multiple levels. Her knowledge of how the 17 local jurisdictions interact with the State and HRPDC is of particular help to our whole of government approach," Toll said.

The two-year pilot project aims to create a template for dealing with sea level rise that can be adapted to other communities across the country. As a member of the Office of Research, Steinhilber will work with Toll on this project, and other sea level rise initiatives across ODU, including the Mitigation and Adaptation Research Institute (MARI) and Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Initiative (CCSLRI).

As a Virginia Beach native and resident, Steinhilber has witnessed the effects of sea level rise first-hand. She moved home to the area to do her part to help Hampton Roads "live with the water" while continuing to thrive both environmentally and economically, she said.

"Our waterways made this a great place to grow up and I want to make sure that this remains the case in the future," Steinhilber said.

A 2007 graduate of the University of Virginia, Steinhilber previously worked in finance law in New York and in interior design in Washington, D.C. She holds a law degree and Master's in Environmental Law and Policy, both from Vermont Law School. She and her husband Dylan live in Virginia Beach with their dog, Linus.

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