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NOAA Officials Visit UVI to Advance \$69M Coastal Resilience Efforts and Student Career Pathways

NOAA Senior Advisor Mark Osler and UVI alumna Julia Plotkin visited CMES as part of the USVI Climate Resilience Regional Challenge, which awarded \$69M for land acquisition, watershed improvements, and youth environmental programs.

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NOAA's Mark Osler, UVI CMES Director, Dr. Tyler Smith, and UVI MMES graduate student Greg Pelose, tour the coral nursery at UVI's CMES operated by Reef Response led by CMES researcher, Dr. Marilyn Brandt. By. UVI

The University of the Virgin Islands' Center for Marine and Environmental Studies recently hosted senior officials from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for a seminar

and campus visit centered on coastal resilience and career development in marine science.

According to UVI, NOAA Senior Advisor for Coastal Inundation and Resilience Mark Osler and Special Assistant and NOAA Knauss Marine Policy Fellow Julia Plotkin — a UVI alumna — visited CMES in January for a seminar titled “Coastal Resilience in Practice: From Science to Service to Career.” The event, followed by a tour of CMES facilities, drew 42 students, faculty, and staff members.

Plotkin, a graduate of UVI’s Master of Marine and Environmental Science program, joined Osler in discussing NOAA’s mission, its aligned interests in the Caribbean, and professional pathways available to students pursuing careers in marine science. Both speakers reflected on their personal career trajectories. Plotkin’s journey included graduate studies at UVI and work with the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Division of Fish and Wildlife.

“The seminar offered valuable information regarding future opportunities beyond academia,” said Isabella Symington St John, a current UVI MMES student. “The open discussion allowed me to gain insight into their personal journeys, understand the different paths individuals can take within the marine science community, and conceptualize where I could be in a few years through Julia’s experiences, grounded in the MMES program’s foundation.”

CMES Interim Director Dr. Tyler Smith emphasized NOAA’s longstanding relationship with UVI.

“CMES and UVI have been a longtime partner with NOAA for ocean science in the region,” Smith said. “It was a true honor to have Mark Osler visit the center from such an important position within NOAA. It was also a tremendous pleasure to welcome back UVI MMES alumna, Julia Plotkin, in her new role at NOAA. This is a testament to the quality of education we provide at UVI and the work preparation provided at the Department of Planning and Natural Resources.”

Osler and Plotkin were in the Virgin Islands for meetings related to the USVI Climate Resilience Regional Challenge project, which awarded \$69 million to the territory for coastal resilience initiatives. Funded projects include land acquisition, watershed improvements, and environmental youth education programs.

At UVI, CRRC funding supports the GRROE USVI Mangroves program led by CMES researcher Dr. Kristin Wilson Grimes, as well as the Caribbean Green Technology Center led by Dr. Greg Guannel.

The USVI was one of only 14 recipients nationwide under NOAA’s CRRC program last year.

Kitty Edwards, Director of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources’ Division of the Territorial Parks and Protected Areas and project lead, described the meeting as mutually beneficial.

“Having Mark and Julia join our CRRC VI Partners Meeting was inspiring and educational,” Edwards said. “It was an amazing opportunity for reciprocal learning – for our federal partners to hear and learn from our local partners and vice versa. The opportunities made available through the CRRC award continue to build community, connections and capacity for the Virgin Islands.”