

Catalyst Profile
Adam Griffith

Adam Griffith, who graduated from WCU in 2008, was known around campus for teaching professors to kayak. After completing his bachelor's degree in biology from Roanoke College in 1999, Griffith chose to attend WCU for his master's in biology. Griffith loved the balance of academics and outdoor activities available to students at WCU.

"The mountains kept me sane," said Griffith.

Since his graduation in 2008, Griffith has worked as a sixth grade science teacher in the suburbs of Texas, served as a Corps member of Teach for America, facilitated kayak lessons and worked as a raft guide for the Nantahala Outdoor Center, led projects as a coastal research scientist for WCU, and has interned for the U.S. Geological Survey studying climate change in Indiana.

Griffith was also selected as a Young Leader in Climate Change (a highly competitive program in which approximately 1,000 people applied for 12 positions). He was given the opportunity to meet the Secretary of Interior, Sally Jewel, while being in Washington D.C. and was able to tour several national park service properties.

Griffith's time spent at WCU has led to many of the opportunities that he has had, too. He was Kathy Matthew's research assistant and worked specifically with her on Geographic Information System (GIS) research, which allowed him to work with other faculty including Rob Young, Ben Tanner, and Jim Costa of whom conducted research and taught at Oxford and helped determine his career path. Of these projects, Griffith helped organize various "student aerial mapping activities on the WCU campus resulting in a map being used by Google for Cullowhee, North Carolina."

"I was impressed that a smaller campus like WCU had minds like these faculty," said Griffith.

Currently, Griffith is trying to decide between "teaching in the academics or working for the government" with an organization like the National Climatic Data Center. He has taught middle schoolers, but his experience at WCU has opened his eyes to higher education academia. When asked what advice he would give to current students who are trying to determine their own career path, he said:

"Do the best you can in academics; this will help you stand out and get noticed by your professors and give you more opportunities," said Griffith. "If you are doing your best, doors will open." Griffith encourages students to talk to their professors about options and ask for guidance even if they feel that they've already nailed down their future goals.

Griffith is currently working on his doctorate in geography and urban analysis at UNC-Charlotte.