

An Open Letter to Stetson University Physics Majors

Victoria Guadagnino ('22)

I am honored to be this year's featured alumni for Stetson University's Physics Department. Stetson University is where I met some of my closest friends and helped me figure out more about myself. One of the most important lessons I have learned over the years is to not be afraid to take risks, as long as I am willing to keep learning.

In May 2022, I received a Bachelor of Science from Stetson University. I majored in Physics and had a minor in Art History. There were only four Physics Majors that graduated that semester. Less than ten days after I walked across the stage, I began working at the City of Fernandina Beach's Utilities Department as the Utilities Engineer. As a twenty-one-year-old, I was excited and nervous. I had applied for almost fifty jobs, and this was the first offer I received. I had limited experience in water-based utilities when I first started, but it was a great opportunity. It was also a job in the town I had lived in for years and where most of my family is.



Me and two other physics majors on our graduation day, May 2022.

Although I was leaning towards Mechanical or Aeronautical Engineering with my Senior Research Project, the opportunity I had was in a different direction. Even if it was a Civil Engineering role, I figured I would take the position. Worst-case scenario, I didn't enjoy it, but I would have real world experience. Best-case scenario, I would stay with it. Thankfully it was the best-case scenario.

By the end of 2022, I had completed training for a Stormwater Operator II certificate and trained in various modelling programs. By end of 2024, I passed my Wastewater Operator C License Exam and earned my Sediment and Erosion Control Inspector License. In May 2025, I graduated from University of Central Florida with my Master of Science in Civil Engineering - Water Resources Engineering (although I decided to be in the Shrimp Fest Parade instead of walking across the stage for my final degree).



Me in the Shrimp Fest Parade, May 2025.

There were times when it felt like a constant uphill battle. I lost count of how many times I had to work on assignments while attending Commission Meetings to take notes or to present an item. I even had to work through three different State of Emergencies within a two-month span at one point while studying for my master's degree. But I kept going through those events and

accomplished many of my goals. Now I am at the point of having to push through the struggles of trying to pass the Fundamentals of Engineering Exam for Civil Engineering.

Another thing I have learned is to accept the lessons that others have offered in order to improve my skills and knowledge. I am aware I don't know everything. So, when the different people who work in different departments or in field offer to teach me what they do, I accept it. I gain better understanding and appreciation for their jobs. It also allows for ways to improve collaboration. While working in the city, I learned how to fix a pipe, open hydrants and valves, run traffic control, bypass a lift station, and so much more. I am constantly learning something new or getting a new experience.



Running traffic control during a stormwater construction project, December 2024.

I have also enjoyed the opportunities my job has offered. There have been chances to attend various conferences with people in similar fields across the state. One project I assisted with received the Excellence in Resiliency Award. Every Halloween, we host various events around the city for family friendly trick or treat. I also volunteer with friends and family at events I have learned about through citizens or work. I have helped do tours of the Water and Wastewater Plants for different groups. I have also presented different items to the Commission and the

Planning Advisory Board on several occasions. I am also a member of the Technical Review Committee, which helps larger development projects build within our city's standards.



Me and coworkers at the award ceremony for the Excellence in Resiliency Award, January 2026.



Me and coworkers had multiple booths at a job fair at the local middle school, May 2025.



Me and my friend at a Halloween event for a local daycare, October 2025.

The one major piece of advice that I have to offer is to keep going for your dreams, but to also be able to adapt as needed. Things will always come up that you won't expect. Not everything will go to plan, and that's not always a bad thing. Having a goal or dream is important to create your desired path, but you need to be flexible when there's an unexpected moment.

Also keep learning. Don't stop once you walk across the stage and accept that degree. The world is constantly changing, and no field stays the same. There will always be people with different points of view and know something that you don't know. Don't be afraid to listen and ask questions.

Physics can be applied in various ways that may not seem obvious. It can be used in careers that are in a lab, an office, or in the field. Don't be afraid to go where you want to or do what you want to do. Take that leap and keep learning. Even if you end up down a path you didn't expect.