



Name: Maureen Mersmann

Josef Korbel School Degree Program: MA [International Administration](#), [Certificate in Humanitarian Assistance](#), 2012

Undergraduate University/Major: Kansas State University; B.S. Human Services

Tell us about yourself:

I grew up in rural Kansas on a dairy farm and have had a variety of careers in my adult life thus far. Throughout, I've been working in disaster response operations and disaster preparedness for about 7 years with the American Red Cross. I started as a volunteer after Katrina in 2005 and have had various roles within the ARC system since then, including as a local Disaster Assistance Team responder and as part of the nationally-deployable Disaster System Human Resources network.

What brought you to the Josef Korbel School?

I had been trying for some time to transition from what was a volunteer experience into a career. I was finding that it is difficult to get your foot in the door, especially if you want to work globally and not just domestically. I also recognized I had certain skill deficiencies and wanted to rectify that situation. I wanted to expand my abilities in terms of monitoring and evaluation, specifically, and more generally really deepen my knowledge of global humanitarian policy and practice. Eventually I see myself in operations management and in organizational management. I was attracted to the Administration program because of its focus on practical training in quantitative analysis and management skills and because of the freedom it allowed me in terms of selecting electives. I saw the opportunity to position my specific M&E focus within a broader framework.

Internship Organization: American Red Cross

Internship Title: Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction

Primary Responsibilities:

Initially, I worked in the Disaster Response Unit. I helped to design – and eventually ran – a two-day large-scale exercise to prepare volunteers to work in shelter settings. I also built a proposal to modify the volunteer onboarding system after recognizing some inefficiencies and opportunities for saving some financial resources. My proposal was adopted, I'm pleased to say. Right now, I am on the Project Management team for a community-based risk mitigation initiative, which is essentially a partnership between ARC and native communities in the U.S.

How did the Josef Korbel School prepare you for this internship?

The series of project management classes, including analysis and evaluation, equipped me with skills that have been very beneficial to my work with ARC. My technical writing abilities have vastly improved, as well.

What was the biggest lesson you learned from your internship?

Keep your ear to the ground. Give all you have to what you're doing, but recognize that you intend to move forward all of the time. Continue to impress, but never settle. Always keep an eye on the future. And remember that as much as you are there to contribute, you are also there to learn. Figure out what you want to learn from the internship experience and advocate for yourself to be assigned to projects that complement your objectives.

Career goals:

Operations management and program evaluation.

Favorite classes and professors:

[Tom Rowe](#), [Tim Sisk](#), and [Chen Ries](#). I think the thing that these people have in common is a fairly dry and oftentimes self-deprecating sense of humor. It really does add a lot to the atmosphere of instruction. It's wonderful to work with someone whose quality of work is fantastic and who takes their work very seriously, but remains approachable and available as a mentor to future professionals in the field.