An environmental manager's take on what employers would like to see in a graduate

*A senior-level manager of an environmental government agency shared the outline below in response to the question of "**what would you like to see in graduates from the EPM master's program?**" This person has many years of experience at federal and state environmental agencies, in which they managed teams of 30-120 people. –Michael Springborn (January 6, 2019).*

The following appear in no particular order:

"Hard" Skills
1. ***Excellent Word and Excel skills.*** Formatting, calculations, graphing, manipulation, etc. should be fast and professional. Deadlines can be short, and there may not be staff to do formatting for you. Decision-makers get distracted by low quality work.
2. ***Excellent writing.*** Graduates should be able to quickly develop options memos with actionable recommendations, useful pros and cons, and context. They should be able to write and edit, keeping the audience in mind.
3. ***Research.*** Graduates should be able to do Boolean searches in Google and Google Scholar, figure out which experts to call for advice, know when they know enough, prioritize their reading, etc. Don't overstate or overgeneralize. But do generalize…
4. ***Working with computers.*** Graduates should ask themselves, "what would I want the computer to be able to do?" They should assume it's possible and learn how to make it happen efficiently. This involves the ability to poke around and find functionalities and tools that could help.
5. ***Ability to read laws and court cases.***
6. ***Survey design and experimental design.*** Poor design can set you back.
7. ***Roles for government and governance.*** Too many models or classes assume single centers of power, clear objectives, and passive people. Graduates should be aware of self-governance, polycentric governance, public choice theory, bounded rationality, fallible and corrupt people, collective action problems, economic development, principal-agent problems, paternalism, power dynamics, etc. Roles of governments of different types and the players in those arenas. Theories of justice.

People Skills
8. ***Coordination.*** Many efforts are run or regulated by several units, boards, departments, offices, agencies, levels of government, sectors, etc. Good work on this kind of team is vital and requires attention to the power dynamics and attitudes of each entity.
9. ***Respect for the role.*** A common issue is what to do when you disagree with your boss. A good answer is, make your case and then back down. A common discussion

is, "how far can we push this before people will write us off as crazy?" Reasonable people can disagree. Picking your battles matters.

10. ***Managing up.*** Many managers suck, so a graduate should be able to manage up. This includes seeking out or developing new work when you have time or see a need. This also includes doing the work needed to master an area.
11. ***Ethics.*** Important. This can be technical, for example, with respect to *data* science.
12. ***Customer service.*** Listening, follow-through, working under adverse conditions to resolve problems. Caring for others.
13. ***Clarifying and meeting expectations.*** Assignments can be unclear. Check in as often as needed, but have the judgement needed so you don't bother your manager too much.

Working Style

14. ***Helpfulness.*** Graduates should help their colleagues.
15. ***Eagerness to learn on one's own.*** While employers do or should offer classes and other forms of training, people who can learn on their own can be highly effective. A background in something technical and formal (STEM, economics, etc.) seems to help some dive into "hard," new areas.
16. ***Making smart efficiency-thoroughness trade-offs in completing a task.*** This is vital.

Broader Vision

17. ***Ability to apply different lenses.*** A graduate should be able to apply several different lenses for assessing the desirability of policies: equity, efficiency, implementability, politics, legal risk…
18. ***Familiarity with wide range of environmental and policy topics and concerns and approaches.*** The graduate should be able to put policy and implementation problems in context and apply insights from a range of domains. Essay assignments involving summarizing the current state of research and open questions for a different policy area are good training here. Also useful for developing broad familiarity are attending guest lectures and reading widely.
19. ***History.*** The environmental movements in the US and elsewhere, in context. History of science. Social movements.
20. ***Scenario development.*** The ability to develop better programs by imagining alternate situations.

For further examples of what potential employers are looking for:

- Look at job postings. For example, at www.jobs.ca.gov, try searches like: CEA environmental; senior environmental, energy policy, water policy, etc.

- Look at the classification specifications here: calhr.ca.gov/state-hr-professionals/Pages/job-descriptions.aspx.