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### Weather 'historian' deals with certainty as an Oklahoma climatologist

By: Jay F. Marks / The Oklahoman

Gary McManus isn't your typical history buff.

He can't necessarily tell you about the world-changing events from a given day, but he will be able to let you know what the weather was like when it happened.

"That's all at my fingertips," McManus said.

As a climatologist, McManus studies long-term weather statistics for the Oklahoma Climatological Survey.

"We put the current weather in context," he said. "We serve as the state weather historians.

"Once it happens, it becomes history."

McManus earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in meteorology from the University of Oklahoma.

Although he is trained to forecast the weather, he said he often tells people he chose climatology because he is better at reporting what happened than predicting it.

McManus said he learned a new way of thinking about weather as a climatologist.

"You just have to immerse yourself in the study and the discipline," he said.

Climatology has a lot in common with meteorology, but it is often a subdiscipline of the geography program at schools like Oklahoma State University.

Officials at the climatological survey typically look for people with a degree in climatology, meteorology or a related field, like geography or environmental sciences, assistant director Renee McPherson said. Other experience can enhance their qualifications to be a climatologist.

McPherson said most rely on knowledge they gain once they are hired.

"Much of the training is just learning that background on our state's weather and climate history," she said.

That is necessary to provide the proper context to the day's high temperature or rainfall total.

McPherson said climatologists must understand how weather develops like a meteorologist, adding historical insight into how it affects the state and its residents.

McManus said he spends a lot of time answering telephone calls from people or state agencies with questions about historical information involving weather. He also fields a lot of calls from people who are involved in lawsuits, so they need details about weather conditions on a specific day.

McPherson said climatologists often work for universities or government entities.

She said they may have a different job title if they work in the private sector, where they use their ability to analyze data to offer insight on weather's impact on business.

Climatologists are especially valuable in the energy industry, McPherson said, because of the drastic effect of climate changes.



Gary McManus is associate state climatologist for the Oklahoma Climatological Survey.  
PHOTO BY Steve Sisney, The Oklahoman