

## CHERYL PEACH | Director, Scripps Educational Alliances (cpeach@ucsd.edu)

### Degree: When, where, what, and what in?

I received my PhD in geological sciences in 1993 in a joint program between the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory (LDEO) of Columbia University and the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). My thesis focused on the geochemistry of platinum group metals in igneous rocks. My research project was largely experimental in nature, but was motivated in part by a fascination with the phenomena of sulfide melt immiscibility observed in mid-ocean ridge basalts, the subject of my master's degree in oceanography from the University of Washington. My undergraduate work at the University of Virginia was in environmental sciences and culminated in a senior thesis on beach sediment transport, a project that inspired me to pursue graduate study in ocean sciences.

### Did you stay in academia at all, and if so, for how long?

All phases of my career have been academic in nature, but my various positions have not always been at a college or university—the places that people typically think of when they use the word *academia*. For example, immediately after earning my PhD, I continued working as a researcher in the Earth and Planetary Sciences Department at AMNH for a couple of years, and subsequently took a position teaching oceanography at a small nonprofit organization, the Sea Education Association.

### How did you go about searching for a job outside of the university setting?

Early in my PhD program, I discovered a love of teaching and pursued every opportunity to hone my skills as an educator. I taught at a local community college during the summer, participated in outreach programs at LDEO and the AMNH, and worked with local science teachers. After receiving my degree, having this experience on my CV made me much more competitive for teaching positions than I

would have been otherwise. My job search after my PhD was as part of a “two-career couple” and was challenging, to say the least. While still in graduate school, my husband and I both received employment offers from oil companies in the Houston area, but after much deliberation, we turned the offers down to pursue what we really wanted with respect to long-term careers. It was a risky move at the time, but fortunately, we eventually both received offers at the same location, his at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, and mine as a faculty member at the Sea Education Association.

### Is this the only job (post-academia) that you've had? If not, what else did you do?

My career consists of two main phases, my present position at Scripps Institution of Oceanography and my previous position at the Sea Education Association. SEA is a Woods Hole, MA, based nonprofit that specializes in field-based ocean education at sea. Students receive a full semester of undergraduate credit for the program through Boston University. The position at SEA is what I often refer to as the best possible teaching position a scientist can have, one in which students learn oceanographic research by doing oceanographic research, and the faculty member is a facilitator rather than a lecturer. As an oceanography faculty member, chief scientist at sea, and on two occasions interim dean, I found the position extremely rewarding professionally and personally. It is gratifying to see students that participated in SEA programs grow enormously, both intellectually and emotionally, during the program, and in some cases to see them pursue highly successful careers related to the ocean. And I learned right along with the students. As a geological oceanographer by training, my background in the other oceanographic disciplines was based on course work rather than research experience. By working with students to collect, process, and



analyze physical, chemical, and biological data at sea, I developed a much better understanding not only of each discipline but also of the ocean as a system.

### What is your current job? What path did you take to get there?

I work at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California San Diego as Director of Scripps Educational Alliances, and I am also a Program Scientist at the Birch Aquarium at Scripps. My position is focused on supporting the interplay between science and education at Scripps, specifically spearheading new initiatives and partnerships in outreach and education, as well as incorporating aspects of Scripps research activities into high-quality education and outreach programs locally, regionally, and nationally. I continue to teach at the undergraduate level, including courses on Earth history and climate science.

The job change from SEA to Scripps was again part of a “two-career couple” move for my husband and me, and was influenced in part by the fact that we had started our family and were struggling with the logistics of both being seagoing scientists. The shift to working at a major research institution and large research university has proven to be one that has provided many opportunities for me to apply my scientific and education training in a different but equally stimulating arena.

**What did your oceanographic education (or academic career) give you that is useful in your current job?**

My tenure as a PhD student has been invaluable in providing me with insight into the ocean science research enterprise and its importance to society, insight that I strive to communicate to the public so that they can understand, appreciate, and advocate for ocean science research. My teaching experiences have provided me with a much broader and deeper knowledge of a wide range of ocean science disciplines, with skill at communicating science to a variety of different audiences, and with the expertise required to help young scientists learn to communicate effectively. I also find that my time at sea as chief scientist taught me to be flexible. For any project or activity, I am not disconcerted when things don't go according to plan but rather find I am able to formulate an alternative plan quickly without being stressed about it.

**Is the job satisfying? What aspects of the job do you like best/least?**

My job is extremely satisfying and stimulating as I continue to be able to fulfill my passion for education in an environment where I can immerse myself in learning about the latest Earth, ocean, and atmospheric science research. Perhaps most deeply satisfying is working as a member of a team dedicated to improving public science literacy and promoting concern for the environment. I thoroughly enjoy the aspects of my job that require high-quality interactions with students, teachers, the public, and research scientists. I dislike most things administrative, and there is quite a bit of that at a large university. That said, I do get a certain degree of satisfaction from learning how to navigate the university system effectively.

**Do you have any recommendations for new grads looking for jobs?**

Take every opportunity to broaden your experience, as it will open up the range of potential career paths you can reasonably

pursue. Have confidence in your abilities, but more importantly, in your ability to learn on the job. After all, that is what your training as a scientist has prepared you for—to work independently and figure things out for yourself. Don't necessarily look for the perfect fit for your credentials, look for something that inspires you. The steep part of the learning curve in any new position is somewhat anxiety ridden, but these are times in which you grow and learn the most, so go for it.