

CAREER PROFILES Options and Insights



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

I earned my bachelor of science degree in ecology from the University of Georgia in 2004. After a year of teaching high school and two years in the Peace Corps in Belize, I went to graduate school

at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California San Diego, where I first earned a master's degree in oceanography and then a PhD in marine biology in 2012. My studies focused on reefs in the Gulf of California.

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

I did not. I often miss research, especially fieldwork, but even back in my grad school days, I knew I ultimately wanted to apply scientific concepts to policymaking.

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

Like many of the scientists featured in this column over the years, I applied for and was awarded a [Knauss Fellowship](#). For people hoping to work on marine policy, fisheries, marine conservation, and the like, the fellowship is a fantastic way to get started. Marine policy and conservation can be tough fields to break into, even with 10-plus years of school and a fellowship. After mine ended, I applied for a lot of jobs at large nongovernmental organizations in Washington, DC. I interviewed for five or six positions without success and spent 10 months writing and consulting. Ultimately, I landed a wonderful job at The Pew Charitable Trusts.

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

It is hard to believe, but I have now been at Pew since late 2014. I've held several different positions in my time with Pew, but all of them have a few things in common. Situated at the intersection of science and policymaking, they have focused on fisheries conservation and the international, multilateral organizations that manage highly migratory/transboundary fisheries. I've worked on tuna conservation across the Atlantic, fishing gear management in high seas fisheries, bycatch protection of sharks caught in pelagic fisheries, and tuna economics, just to name a few.

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

Each of my jobs at Pew progressively led me to my current role as a project director on our international fisheries team. My first assignment was to support our lead Atlantic Ocean fisheries campaigner. I eventually took over that role, then added work on the eastern Pacific. Now, I lead a team of scientists and campaigners working at 10 regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) around the world. Participation ranges from nine to 53 member governments, and they cover geographic areas from the Mediterranean Sea to the massive western and central Pacific Ocean. Even the fisheries themselves vary, from a few dozen metric tons of blackspot seabream caught by Spain and Morocco to more than a million metric tons of Pacific skipjack caught by dozens of countries.

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

In grad school, I remember an advisor saying that conservation organizations will often hire a person with a PhD—even if the position is not for research—because they value the ability to identify and solve problems. Our international fisheries work pursues science-based policies, so my graduate training serves me well. Our international fisheries team also works at the nexus of science and policy, so I would not be nearly as successful without the strong scientific foundation that the University of Georgia and Scripps Institution of Oceanography faculties provided. The oceanographers and biologists I know from those institutions are among the smartest people I've met. Their skillsets and curiosity would translate to success in any field—if they were in finance, they could be high-powered bankers; if they were authors, they could be award-winners. They just chose to study and understand the ocean, and they are very good at it.

Is there any course or other training you would have liked to have had as part of your graduate education to meet the demands of the job market?

Easy answer—more languages. My colleagues who speak three or four languages are amazing campaigners. Being able to speak with policymakers in the languages most comfortable for them is a valuable skill that I wish I had. I do speak some Spanish, but I'd also like to speak French or Japanese, or any of the many other languages vital to fisheries work.

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

I love this job. Seeking policies that I sincerely believe are the best for international fisheries management is really satisfying, and I think it is important work. The transition from academia was a challenge to navigate at the beginning, but it's been professionally rewarding. I've particularly enjoyed becoming a spokesperson, which is a difficult skillset to build. But after 11 years at Pew, I know that it is a perfect fit for me. I feel particularly lucky that Pew commits to issues over long enough time periods to achieve durable change.

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

When it comes to finding a job in oceanography that you love, don't settle. I've been lucky to work for the same organization for a long time, but that is not necessarily common. Valuable lessons can be learned in moving from place to place and taking advantage of new opportunities for training. When we have an opening at Pew, we receive many CVs from applicants who have held several jobs, each for two to three years at a time. In many of these cases, the applicants have had interesting, diverse experiences that can all contribute to their success in different types of roles.

Also, to the extent that is possible, start talking to people who work where you want to work well before you graduate, just to make some connections, share your grad school experiences, and ask about theirs. It may sound a bit cliché, but those personal connections go a long way.

ARTICLE DOI. <https://doi.org/10.5670/oceanog.2025.e401>