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

I began as a forestry major in 1993 at Penn State, but two important events changed my course. During my sophomore year, I participated in an Outward Bound excursion that consisted of sailing in the Florida Keys, and the following summer I took a cross-country camping and backpacking trip with a friend. I'll never forget seeing the Pacific Ocean for the first time at Big Sur. That's where I had an epiphany: I wanted to study coastal processes. I went back to Pennsylvania to try to figure out how to do that. In 1996, I earned a bachelor of science degree in environmental resource management with a minor in marine science. This laid the foundation for my future career in coastal management.

I then moved to the coast to attend graduate school at the University of South Florida (USF), a much more convenient location for fieldwork. I earned an MS in geology in 1999 and immediately began a PhD program, but then made some big career moves while working toward graduation in 2006.

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

I did not stay in academia. In fact, I left before I graduated. Although I eventually received my PhD from the USF Geology Department where I started, I transferred to the School of Marine Science

for a while, and for two years I worked at the US Geological Survey Center for Coastal Studies in St. Petersburg, Florida. I was then offered a position as the Pinellas County Coastal Coordinator, which sent me into the public sector. I never went back.

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

I was fortunate to be living, studying, and working in the coastal and marine science mecca of the Tampa-St. Petersburg area. There were ample opportunities to work in the career field that I'd chosen. The first person I always started with when looking for a new direction was my advisor. I received excellent advice from advisors at Penn State and at USF regarding future directions, contacts, and work opportunities.

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

I've been running my own consulting business since leaving Florida in 2009. This is my third "real" job.

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

I am President of Elko Coastal Consulting, which specializes in beach preservation advocacy, research, and management. In this position, I play several roles. I provide coastal management services to beach communities, and I also provide advocacy services to nonprofit organizations. For example, one of my roles is Science Director of the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA). There, I aim to help translate societally relevant coastal management challenges into research needs and science questions for the nearshore research community to address.

I am now based in a region strong in coastal management, at Folly Beach, South Carolina, just outside of Charleston, near NOAA's Office for Coastal Management and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control Ocean and Coastal Resource Management. Deciding to go into business on my own was scary, and I did a few jobs for pennies to get a foot in the door in South Carolina. But it paid off, and now another of my roles is executive director of the South Carolina Beach Advocates, a non-profit that I helped to found in 2015.

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

I still use many of my graduate school textbooks when writing papers and reports. The technical training that I received from Skip Davis and Bob Dean is still relevant in my coastal management and advocacy work. They taught me more than textbook materials as well. The skills of observation and deduction that I learned as a field geologist and an aspirational coastal engineer have made me not only a keen scientist but also a better service provider to my clients.

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?

My last answer alluded to the social aspect of coastal management. Training in the social sciences and business management would be useful in most careers.

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

Yes, I love making connections between coastal management challenges at the local and national levels. Coastal managers around the United States all face

similar challenges, but it is useful to remind them that there are others out there, maybe on the other coast, in the same boat, so to speak.

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

Pick your specialty based on your passion and start networking early. A solid network of colleagues and coworkers is your most valuable asset in career development. 