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

I completed a BS in geology at the University of Florida (Go Gators!) in 1997. My undergraduate advisor studied mid-ocean ridges and hydrothermal vents, and his videos of black smokers and tubeworms sucked me right into marine geology. I earned an MS in geology at Vanderbilt University in 1999, researching microplate evolution. I completed my PhD at the University of Washington in 2007, studying the tectonic and magmatic evolution of mid-ocean ridges and hydrothermal vents.

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

I did not stay in academia at all, and I'm not sure it was ever truly part of my planned career path. When I finished my MS, all I wanted was a job and a paycheck. I had no intention of going back for a PhD. After working for a few years, I missed marine geology and decided that my job prospects would be better with a PhD (seriously! What was I thinking?).

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

I definitely didn't apply the scientific method. My boyfriend really wanted to move back to his hometown of Washington, DC, and I had been vaguely thinking about applying for a science policy fellowship. A few years before I defended my dissertation, I had the opportunity to be on a research cruise with a National Science Foundation program manager, and her job sounded



so interesting. I thought a fellowship might get my foot in the door for a government job. I ended up applying for and accepting a John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship, which is run by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Sea Grant Program. After interviewing with a multitude of Congressional offices during an exhausting placement week, I chose to be placed in the office of a very conservative Senator from Louisiana. It was an eye-opening experience. I learned so much about politics and how science does (and does not!) influence policy decisions. I hadn't really known very much about policy or politics, so it was an extremely valuable crash course in how the US government works.

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

Between my MS and PhD, I spent two years working for the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution as a Physical Oceanography Research Associate. It was

really interesting work—I worked with gliders, taught myself some basic programming, went out on some really crazy research cruises (pirates!), and learned a lot about physical oceanography and engineering. This job served me well when I went back to school for my PhD and worked in a very multidisciplinary group that spent a lot of time at sea.

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

I am a Senior Program Officer for the Ocean Studies Board of the National Research Council, which is part of the US National Academy of Sciences. The National Research Council is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization, and we provide independent, objective science and technology advice to the federal government. My job is to bring scientific experts together to help solve issues in which federal agencies are interested, and it is super interesting. The experts we work with are all volunteers and are among the best in their respective fields, and they bring passion and energy to whatever task they have been asked to do. I help them come to consensus around the issue and assist them in writing a report for our sponsoring federal agencies. I feel strongly that my organization is an important way for scientists to help provide advice to the government, and I personally like engaging in the "policy" without the "politics." My favorite parts of the job are working with the volunteers, who are amazing scientists and dedicated people, and learning about each new project. I've been able

to participate in studies as far ranging as ocean research infrastructure, the tsunami warning system, scientific ocean drilling, methane hydrates, and future questions in physical oceanography. I found out about the National Research Council when the board provided an information session for my class of Knauss Fellows, and I immediately thought, “This is the job I want.” When an Ocean Studies Board position became available, my interests and skills happened to be a good fit with board needs. In addition to a strong scientific and technical background in oceanography, I understood the political system and how policy decisions are made. I’ve been in my position for four years and still enjoy coming to work every day!

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

As an oceanographer, I learned so much more than science. Because I spent a lot of time at sea, I had to learn to work with difficult personalities, deal with bad weather, and fix instruments that didn’t want to operate (all while being seasick). Research cruises are strong team environments, and they definitely helped me learn to solve problems, work with other people, compromise, and prioritize. In addition, my experiences during graduate school and in my position at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution allowed me to build a large network of oceanographic experts that I can now draw on in this job. I feel fortunate to have gone to sea with a lot of fantastic people, and I call on them for committee service or for suggestions regarding experts to contact in a particular field.

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

My position is very satisfying, because I truly believe that I am helping the government to make better decisions about science policy. While we are not engaging in research itself, the committees I work with use current scientific research to assist decision makers who may not have any scientific background or understanding. The only downside of my job is that we are soft money, so we constantly write proposals to keep ourselves funded. It is not so different from academia in that respect.

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

Be open to possibilities! It is important to recognize that you have gained skills and strengths outside of pure research, but that you might have to be creative in describing the many things you can do. I’d also look very strongly at fellowships, and be aware of their qualifications and deadlines. (Do you have to be a current student? Do you have to have a PhD in hand before applying?) Based on my lab mates and graduate school cohort, fellowships have been the most valuable tool to gain experience and attain jobs.