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

I earned an undergraduate degree in biology from the University of Sussex (UK) but was not inspired, so I volunteered on a converted whaler/environmental oil spill cleanup vessel. There, I met someone who had just finished a degree in oceanography. I had never heard of such a wonderful degree, but I soon began studying for a master's in physical oceanography at the University of Wales, totally enjoying the theory as well as actually watching it play out in the ocean. I became completely hooked and wanted to understand more, so I continued on with my schooling and earned a PhD in physical oceanography from the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2005. My PhD research focused on the large-scale interannual variability of the oceans neighboring South Africa and the interocean fluxes south of Africa on monthly through to interannual time scales. This region is of interest because evidence exists that sea surface temperature variability in the South Indian Ocean (in particular, the Agulhas Current) may significantly influence weather and climate patterns in the southern African region, potentially having an impact on a huge number of people who rely on rain-fed subsistence farming. The Agulhas Current has also been shown to be a key part of global thermohaline circulation. Most of the work was done using numerical models.

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

I continued and expanded my work as a postdoc at UCT. I was offered postdocs in other countries, which would have been awesome opportunities, but I felt that there was still so much to do in the context of South African oceanography. Here, you have a lot of freedom as

a postdoc to develop your own research agenda, lead proposals, represent South Africa at international workshops, and also lecture and supervise students. It was also a life choice to stay in Cape Town. I hoped that if I could publish enough during my postdoc, it wouldn't matter whether I were in Cape Town or somewhere else. I remained a postdoc for two years.

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

I was on a number of mailing lists for jobs all around the world as, at the time, the job market for permanent positions in Cape Town for marine science was fairly limited. You pretty much had to wait for someone to retire, which most oceanographers don't ever do! Then, I saw an ad for the position I currently have and thought, why not?

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

This is the only permanent position I have held. I also did some consulting and lecturing part time.

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

My job title is manager and principal oceanographer of the SAEON Egagasini Node for Marine Offshore Systems. My responsibilities include developing and maintaining the science plan; designing and implementing observation and modeling programs; writing project proposals; supervising students and interns; providing leadership (both scientific and business) to staff and contract positions, interns, and students; managing budgets and data; networking; sitting on various advisory boards; managing the education outreach component; capacity



building; maintaining finances; reporting to the South Africa National Research Foundation; and conducting research on climate variability using long-term observations and models.

This position was an incredible opportunity for me as it was a new, government-funded organization, and my job was basically to set up the marine offshore component. I had plenty of freedom to do this. When I started, I relied very much on the networks I forged as a PhD and postdoc to help guide me, as I didn't have a clue about business plans or human resources. Now, I manage a team of inspiring people. I find the word management somewhat scary, but it is actually amazing to be able to work with a great team of people and help them to achieve their potential.

I would say the people management aspect takes up about 30% of my time, with project management about 50%. The final 20% of my time is occupied with a variety of more academic tasks. I am a research fellow at two South African universities where I currently supervise six PhD students, three MSc students, and a number of honors students. I also work on smaller research projects and write proposals.

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

My education gave me a passion for oceanography and an understanding of how to be a good mentor and supervisor. It also made me realize that oceanographers are incredibly lucky. We often get to work in amazing places, and because most oceanographers are passionate about the ocean, we always have something in common with our colleagues and collaborators.

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

I love my job. I love being able to work with many different people on many different aspects of marine science. I also love the fact I can still supervise students and work on capacity development within the country and Africa as a whole.

Because SAEON is a network, I am able to continuously foster collaborations where I see potential. I am given the freedom and encouragement to pursue many different opportunities. Sometimes it is difficult, as there are so many things to manage and I don't say no often enough, so I am at risk of becoming jack-of-all-trades, master of none. For example, on the one hand I am co-PI of a massive program to observe the Agulhas Current with a series of moorings, working with renowned international and national scientists and organizing cruises and data and equipment. On the other hand, I am co-PI of a project that is developing coastal models of South Africa.

I miss being able to devote days to solving some sort of MATLAB or coding problem, or having that eureka moment when you discover some really interesting relationship—but I can live vicariously through my students! I also sometimes feel that I skipped a few years of career development. It would have been good to have spent more time as a post-doc so that I could have published more, but that wouldn't have changed the path I have taken. Sometimes the “politicking”

gets a bit much but I have grown to enjoy it and not take it too seriously.

I also love that I can surf during office hours and claim to be investigating the ocean!

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

Form networks with your peers now and try to network with others as much as possible. Find out about opportunities and don't be afraid to ask for advice or contact people with whom you'd like to work. Don't just complete a PhD, do some lecturing or student mentorship, apply for different grants when you are able to, run workshops or paper reading sessions, and use your initiative. Keep a good balance. For example, don't lecture 10 different courses so you have no time to publish. Lecture for just a few courses to get experience and to build confidence in public speaking. That will be enough.

Always make sure your CV is up to date, comprehensive, and error-free. Send it to a mentor or friend for review. Mold it to suit the particular job you are applying for. If you are invited for an interview, find out as much information as you can about the organization and the position so you are prepared, and show initiative and interest.

Remember that your career is not your life. Try to keep a balance and find a job that makes you happy—work like a captain and play like a pirate! 🏴‍☠️