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

I earned my bachelor of science degree in geological sciences from Tufts University, then a master of science (organochlorine pollutants in Arctic ice) and a PhD (geochemical proxies for upwelling in coral skeleton) from the University of Pennsylvania, completing the latter in 2007.

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

I took a two-year postdoctoral research associate position in analytical geochemistry at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), where I spent most days in the clean lab wearing a Tyvek suit doing column chemistry and running an inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometer.

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

Knowing that my two-year position was coming to an end, my options were to stay as a permanent staff member at LANL, apply for faculty jobs, or consider “something else”—but I wasn’t quite sure what that meant. Fortunately, I had been serving on the board of directors of a small professional society, the Association for Women Geoscientists, since grad school, working with colleagues from a variety of backgrounds: policy specialists, independent consultants, and small business owners, as well as professors and full-time researchers. A number had served as congressional fellows through geoscience professional societies (i.e., American Geophysical Union, American Geosciences Institute, Geological Society of America) and their descriptions of working in the nation’s capital were fascinating. I threw my hat in the ring for those fellowships, and was

selected by the American Geosciences Institute to be the 2009–2010 William L. Fisher Congressional Geoscience Fellow.

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

I spent an amazing year working for then-Representative (now Senator) Edward Markey of Massachusetts as a science fellow, learning about how the legislative sausage was made (or not) on Capitol Hill. That experience alone would have made the year a notable one in my career, but then the Deepwater Horizon disaster unfolded, and my boss was in the middle of it as chair of a subcommittee with oversight of one of the federal agencies involved and chair of the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming. It was the latter committee’s website that first put up the live stream of the “SpillCam.” I was blown away by the amazing scientists working on behalf of our country, notably marine geophysicist Marcia McNutt, who had just started her tenure as the head of the US Geological Survey. I realized then that my interests had permanently pivoted away from academia. I wanted to be where the rubber met the road of science, policy, and society.

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

After my time on the Hill, I spent a year as a AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellow in the State Department’s Office of Marine Conservation working on international fisheries and co-chairing a working group drafting the US position on the ocean for the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. Since then, I’ve worked for three different nonprofit organizations supporting sustainable



fisheries and marine conservation advocacy. For the past two years, I’ve served as the Deputy Chief Scientist for Oceana, the largest international advocacy organization focused solely on ocean conservation.

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

The training we receive to become scientists serves us in so many other ways. Running dissertation research in a remote location with a limited budget and/or a team of assistants? That is project management. Giving talks at conferences and teaching undergrads? That’s public speaking. Distilling years of research into a single abstract? That’s concise writing. Having a question posed and knowing how to go out and find the answer? That research skill is useful if you’re wondering about geochemical proxies or fishery management policy!

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

Of the many fine scientists out there, only some can write with elegance and clarity. This is an especially valuable combination, and I would love to see graduate programs offer writing courses to improve our ability to reach non-technical audiences.

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

I love my job. In some ways, I feel like I've come full circle since my first science policy job here in Washington, DC. I decided to stay after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and now with Oceana I'm helping lead the charge against the proposed massive expansion of offshore oil drilling in the United States. We all have different talents and passions, and I feel like I've found where mine can be put to best use.

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

Look for opportunities through your professional societies that you might not be able to access on your own from grad school. This could be serving on a policy or communication committee, participating in a congressional visits day, or taking a leadership position in the society itself. These posts can put you in the orbit of people from different backgrounds and in different places in their careers—great folks to tap as you explore your options. 