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

In 2005, I earned my bachelor's and master's degrees in biological sciences from the University of Namur in Belgium. As part of the master's degree, I had the opportunity to work at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) in Tasmania, Australia, on the mechanisms driving harmful algal blooms in estuaries. This experience sparked an interest in pursuing research on phytoplankton, its variability, and its impacts. When I returned to Belgium, I undertook a master's degree in oceanography at the University of Liège. Then, in 2007, I moved back to Australia to start a PhD in oceanography at the University of Western Australia. My dissertation research focused on the physical and biogeochemical conditions around the Ningaloo Reef off Western Australia and the transport of dissolved and particulate matter to this reef.

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

Toward the end of my PhD, I applied for a postdoctoral position at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. I was accepted as a postdoctoral researcher under the Goddard Earth Sciences Technology and Research (GESTAR) cooperative agreement to work on the effects of climate variability on phytoplankton communities.

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

As part of my PhD, I worked on some NASA data. One day I found some interesting features in the South Pacific and contacted the team that worked on the

model simulations. We started collaborating on a paper to highlight some of the findings of this project. I then applied for a postdoctoral position at NASA to pursue this research. After one year as a postdoctoral researcher, I was offered the position of research scientist and enthusiastically accepted!

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

Yes, this is the first permanent position I have had. I started here in 2011 as a postdoctoral researcher and in 2012 I switched to a research scientist position. While the focus of my research hasn't changed much, the number of projects have multiplied over the last five years.

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

As a research scientist working for Universities Space Research Association at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, I use satellite, numerical model, and in situ data to assess the effects of climate variability on ocean biogeochemistry. Some of the projects focus on specific parts of the world like the Arctic, but the majority of my work is at a global scale. Since late 2015, I have also become a deputy manager, which means that I get to have a taste of what being a manager involves and decide whether this is something I would like to pursue in the future. I am also Principal Investigator on the Plankton, Aerosol, Cloud, ocean Ecosystem (PACE) mission, a satellite ocean color mission planned to launch in ~2022–2023. Being part of the science team so early on has been a rich learning experience so far. It's amazing the number of factors that need to be considered



when developing a mission concept and making decisions that range from launch vehicle design to specifications for onboard instruments.

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

My oceanographic education, as well as the work I did during my PhD, was very much focused on data collected in the field. It was only toward the end of my PhD work that I started looking into satellite and numerical data. The field experience I had really taught me the many challenges that field sampling represent. I have a very deep appreciation for in situ data sets used in the validation and parameterization of models and satellite data. I now use an interdisciplinary approach to my research by combining satellite, numerical, and in situ data to make the best use of each of these sources for climate research. The international experience that I acquired during my academic career also taught me how the various systems work around the world. Switching from academia to industry and now government-oriented work allowed me to see the advantages and disadvantages of the different systems and countries.

***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?***

I think the best training comes from the people you meet along the way, including advisors and mentors. I was very lucky to have some very good advisors and mentors. The best training sometimes comes from experiences, including failures. As hard as it can be to have a project that fails or a paper/proposal rejected, you learn a lot from these experiences. If you have mentors around you that can support you and guide you through the systems, it makes the whole experience a lot more enjoyable.

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

The research I do here is extremely gratifying, I work among experts in various areas of modeling and satellite research. The diversity of projects that we get to work on means there is never a boring day! While I do enjoy writing proposals, it can sometimes feel like a lot of time is spent on writing without knowing whether the project will get funded. However, there are benefits to be gained from thinking about a new project, posing research questions, and determining how to answer them.

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

Be very open-minded about potential jobs and places to work. If you can, go to conferences, and if you particularly enjoy someone's talk, go and speak with them. They may have some funding, or know of some colleagues looking for postdocs or who have other positions available. If not, most of them will be very keen on giving you advice or names of people who may be interested in the research you want to do. Don't hesitate to contact people by email. Make sure you explain to them the type of research you are looking to do and how you see yourself fitting into their current research.