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

I received my PhD from the Marine Estuarine Environmental Sciences program at the University of Maryland in 2006, specializing in oceanography. My research focused on the influence of land use and agricultural management practices on nutrient concentrations in Chesapeake Bay. This was where I started to develop a passion for ocean biogeochemistry and sustained observing.

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

After finishing my PhD, I wanted to better understand the role of science in society and where my interests and skills would best fit within that continuum. At that time I wasn't sure how to go about that, but a fellow graduate student suggested the John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship, which places recent marine science graduates in policy positions in Washington, DC. I was awarded the fellowship and worked in NOAA's Office of Legislative Affairs where I served as a liaison for climate research between the agency and Congress. This was an eye-opening experience and a good fit for me, so I was hired on in a permanent position and stayed for almost three years. During this time, I worked on legislation, prepared NOAA leadership and scientists for Congressional testimony, and got to learn the inner workings of both NOAA and Congress. Living in and learning the science policy culture for those years changed the trajectory of my career and has made a deep mark on the scientist I am today.

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

Networking. Graduate training focuses primarily on the academic track, so searching for a job outside that setting requires putting yourself out there beyond the university setting.

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

After three years post academia, I wanted back! During my time in DC working on climate science policy, I was inspired by many of the scientists I met, including two of my future mentors, Jane Lubchenco and Richard Feely. I realized those who inspired me most were not the policy experts in DC but the scientists who could navigate successfully in both the policy and science worlds. Then it occurred to me that with my new policy experience, I could do that, too!

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

I'm a research scientist at the University of Washington Joint Institute for the Study of the Atmosphere and Ocean and lead the CO₂ and ocean acidification mooring network at NOAA's Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory (PMEL). After DC, I worked briefly with Jane Lubchenco and the Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans and then became a National Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow with Richard Feely at PMEL, where I've been ever since.



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

Everything. Whether I stayed in ocean science policy or ended up back in research where I am now, core oceanography is key to a deep understanding of so many of the cross-cutting issues I've worked on. Through my experiences in the science and policy worlds, I've met friends and colleagues who work in a variety of fields: congressional staffers, natural resource managers, environmental advocates, journalists, science writers, and environmental filmmakers. In their cases as well as mine, ocean science education provided a solid foundation that was our greatest asset in building each of these diverse careers.

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?

When I was in graduate school, the new focus at the time was interdisciplinary science. Now, this is the norm in the ocean sciences, and the new horizon many universities are aiming for is communication and engagement beyond academia. I would have liked to have had more training in that and, frankly, whatever will be

the next exciting topic on the frontier of science training. I think many universities are doing a great job pioneering those new frontiers—so much so that sometimes I get the itch to be a grad student again.

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

I now realize my career path was a bit risky. Stepping out of science for a few years and coming back is not common. But I was following the path that felt right at the time, and as a result, my career is now a combination of all the things I'm passionate about: sustained ocean observing, the science of ocean change, and application of that science to address societal needs. Managing a sustained ocean observing network is time consuming, and there are never enough hours in the day. However, it's incredibly exciting to be a part of the high-quality research that results from sustained observing, and this is, undoubtedly, the most satisfying part of my job.

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

Networking. Use your advisor, committee members, and other professors for the connections they have. Talk to your graduate student friends who are now in post-graduate positions and learn from their experiences. And don't be afraid to take a risk if that's where your heart is leading you! 🌀