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

I completed my PhD in oceanography at Oregon State University in 1992. I studied the transport and settling of particles in the deep-sea hydrothermal plume above Endeavour Ridge, the northern end of the Juan de Fuca Ridge, about 250 km southwest of Vancouver Island. I used moored sediment traps, current meters, and transmissometers that we deployed and recovered from Canadian research vessels.

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

I stayed in academia, but neither in research nor teaching. Within two weeks of defending my thesis, I moved from Corvallis, Oregon, to San Diego where my husband, Peter, began a faculty position at Scripps Institution of Oceanography. Eager to try my hand at work that would allow me to share my passion for science with nonscientists, I set about finding a job that involved public outreach.

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

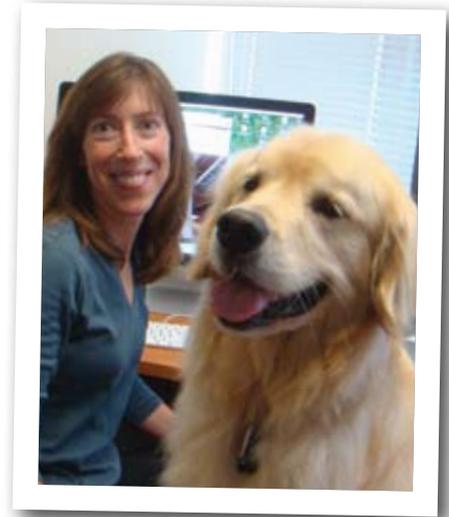
I was able to find work within the university—UC San Diego—through networking and good fortune. A senior professor at Scripps introduced me to colleagues who were working in informal science education and public outreach. These folks helped me get started on a nontraditional, postgraduate career path.

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

My first few jobs at Scripps involved working with the Institution's aquarium—designing outdoor, get-your-hands-wet educational programs for visitors, developing a curriculum on global change, and launching a program of volunteer-led tours of the Scripps campus. Later, I held positions with a climate research center at Scripps and California Sea Grant. Still later, when my daughter was a baby, I did some project-based writing for the Scripps Director. Then, for five years, with generous funding from NSF and an academic appointment at Scripps, I worked to facilitate the incorporation of education and public outreach activities in scientists' research proposals.

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

I'm the director of the Research Proposal Development Service at UC San Diego. My unit is part of the UC San Diego Office of Research Affairs and facilitates the development of large, interdisciplinary proposals, mostly to federal agencies. A few years ago, I was looking for a change in professional direction. I contacted the Vice Chancellor for Research who happened to need some help with a special project. I began working for him on a part-time basis and transitioned to full-time in my current position.



Sharon and Wally, her registered therapy dog who she takes to hospitals and other venues to help reduce patients' stress.

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

My education and career continue to provide opportunities for me to become a better thinker and communicator. Thinking critically and communicating in ways that are expected and respected in academia are essential skills in my work. Oceanography is inherently interdisciplinary. My doctoral thesis, for example, brought together concepts from physical, chemical, biological, and geological oceanography. Training in oceanography deepened my appreciation for and comfort with working at the intersections of fields, something I do regularly in my current job.

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

It's very satisfying to play an instrumental role in getting a \$10- or \$50-million proposal out the door after weeks, sometimes months of hard

work, especially when the PI says: “We couldn’t have done it without you.” Among the things I really love about my job are opportunities to explore new fields—recently, bioengineering, biofuels research, computer science, and research ethics. I get to work with highly accomplished, ambitious faculty, researchers, staff, and administrators from all across campus. The feeling of being truly useful to and respected by the people I work with and my institution is terrific. It’s always cause for celebration when a

proposal we’ve worked on gets funded. We occasionally encounter an investigator who seems to be less invested in a proposal’s success than we are. The challenges that situation presents might be an aspect of the job I like least.

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

Be entrepreneurial. Find or create work rather than waiting patiently until you see an advertisement for a job that looks appealing. Reach out to and enlist

the help of personal and professional acquaintances who may connect you with others who are in a position to put you to work. Maintain a can-do attitude, even when you’re not sure how you’ll accomplish a particular set of tasks. If you made it through graduate school successfully, you’re likely pretty resourceful, so well equipped to take on new challenges. Prepare yourself for the inevitable twists and turns in your career path. 