

Finding Your Way: Careers in Science Policy

Brianna Blaser, PhD

AAAS/Science Careers

AAAS

- International nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing science, engineering, and innovation throughout the world
- Membership-based organization
- Publisher of *Science*
- Source for broad range of career advice and resources through ScienceCareers.org
- Science Careers Outreach Program



Introduction

- Are these careers “alternative”?
- What sorts of opportunities are there?
- How do you decide what to do?
- How do you get there?
- Specific advice for policy careers

Right now there are some 60,000 biomedical postdocs in the U.S. ...perhaps 800 get academic jobs each year at ... serious research institutions. Perhaps that many more get faculty positions at other types of institutions. The traditional idea is that a postdoc lasts 3 years, but the way things are going it will take about half a century to get all the current postdocs into good faculty jobs. ... Next year, I am sure, we'll create several thousand new PhDs. Let us be grateful that there are other kinds of work for them to do.

- Jim Austin, Editor, *Science Careers*

Young people themselves don't realize how valuable they are with a PhD. It means an ability to think deeply, solve problems, analyze data, criticize, and be criticized. [PhDs] often don't realize the breadth of what they are capable of doing.

- Neal Lane, Science Advisor to Bill Clinton

Consider that the average person sleeps 8 hours per day; that leaves 16 hours for other activities. From the time that we are roughly five years old through the time we retire in our 60s or beyond, most of us are involved in vocational activities – educational and work – one-half or more of those remaining hours, 5 days per week. If you are unfulfilled in your work like, your dissatisfaction will certainly affect other areas of your life.

- Michael Shahnasarian, *Decision Time: A Guide to Career Enhancement*

Myths About Post-academic Careers:

- No one would hire you. You have no useful skills.
 - Your research is your most valuable asset.
 - People who work in the business world are stupid and boring.
 - Jobs in the business world are stupid and boring.
- Adapted from Susan Basalla and Maggie Debelius' *"So What Are You Going to Do With That?" Finding Careers Outside Academia*

What do scientists do outside of research?

- Work with science, technology, or scientists
- Disseminate science
- Work with science in other institutions
- Become their own bosses
- And?...

What career path is right for you?

The Decision Cycle

 Awareness

 Self-Assessment

 Exploration

 Integration

5. Commitment

6. Implementation

7. Re-evaluation

(Adapted from Carney & Wells 1995)

Self-Assessment, Exploration, and Integration

- Research your options
- Reflect on your preferences
- Conduct informational interviews
- Network

Research Your Options

- Ask unbiased sources
- Speak with career counselors
- Read about career paths
 - ScienceCareers.org – articles and forum
 - Alternative Careers in Science – Robbins-Roth
 - Put Your Science to Work - Fiske
 - So What Are You Going to Do With That? – Basalla & Debelius

Reflect on Your Preferences

- Take career inventories and self-assessments
- Informally reflect on preferences
 - Journal
 - Pro and con lists
 - Lists of skills and values

Questions to Consider

- What do you like to do?
- What energizes you?
- Do you want to do lab work?
- What would you miss about being in the lab?
- Where do you want to work?
- What do you want to wear to work?
- How often do you want to change projects?
- How much do you want to work with others?

More Questions to Consider

- What sorts of hours do you want to work?
- Are you willing to travel?
- What sort of funding situation do you want to be in?
- What non-science interests or skills do you want to use?
- How important is your income level? job security?
- What sort of stress levels do you want to deal with?
- Would you like to work independently or as part of a team?
- Who do you know who likes their job?

Yet Other Considerations

- Employment trends
- Societal needs
- Economic conditions
- Family responsibilities
- Geographic considerations

Informational Interviewing

- Learn about career options and expand your network
- Ask for a few minutes of the person's time
- Prepare ahead of time
- Ask open-ended questions
- Mind your manners
- Ask for referrals
- Afterwards, write a thank you note

Questions to ask

- What attracted you to this field?
- What do you like most or least about this position or field?
- Describe a typical day or week.
- What steps did you take to break into this field?
- What skills are most helpful in your job? How can I develop them?
- To what professional associations do you belong?
- What advice would you give somebody interested in your line of work?

Other Networking

- Ask your contacts about career options
- Social networking
- Career fairs
- Meetings and conferences
- Mentoring programs

Transitioning/Implementation

- Think about your skill set
 - Skills you have
 - Skills employers want
- Develop and cultivate new skills
- Start following a career path

Skills You Have

- Data analysis and management
- Project management
- Communication
- Computer and technical operations
- Teaching and leadership
- Teamwork
- Problem-solving and critical thinking
- Technical knowledge

Skills Employers Want

- Learning to learn
- Reading, writing, and computation
- Communication
- Adaptability
- Personal management
- Group effectiveness
- Leadership

Develop New Skills

You might need experience in new arenas!

- Volunteer
- Complete an internship
- Pursue fellowships
- Get additional training
- Take a part-time or temporary job
- Demonstrate an interest in your new career path

Start Following a Career Path

- Decide whether you need a postdoc
- Start sending out applications
- Be explicit about the skills you have
- Make a plan (or not)
 - Individual Development Plans – FASEB

Science Policy

- Work on government policies that intersect with science
- Bridge between the policy world and scientists
- Communication skills are key
- Fellowships to enter the field

[Scientists] know how to go find the right information [and communicate it to nonscientists. As information] goes up the ladder, you certainly don't want the wrong information getting to the people who make policy decisions. You don't want the secretary saying the wrong thing. So you need to understand the technical details of a particular problem, even if it's not in your area, and then relate key points in a nontechnical way."

- Katherine Seley-Radtke

AAAS Policy Fellowships

- Not just a career transition program
- Current class
- Placements
- Requirements
- Post-fellowship employment

Other Fellowship Programs

- Check with your professional organizations
- National Academies Christine Mirzayan Science & Technology Policy Graduate Fellowship Program
- Presidential Management Fellows Program
- The Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellowships Program

Examples of Policy Careers

- Associate Director, White House Office of Science & Technology Policy
- President, National Center for Policy Research for Women & Families
- Assoc. Director, Nicholas Institute of Environmental Policy Solutions, Duke Univ.
- Senior Science Adviser, Office of Science Policy and Planning, NIH
- Water Resource Specialist in Agriculture & Rural Development, World Bank
- Senior Adviser, Regional Conflict, Democracy, & Governance, USAID (Kenya)
- Regulatory Analyst, Biotechnology Regulatory Services, U.S. Dept of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
- Special Policy Adviser to Executive Director of World Food Programme, Rome
- Program Officer, Science & Technology, Global Development, Gates Foundation
- Global Director, Fleet/Forces Department and Head, International Liaison Office, Office of Naval Research, U.S. Navy

Other Careers Related to Science Policy

- Academic administration
- Non-profit organizations
- Research funding administration
- Regulatory affairs

But what will my advisor think?

- Your career path is about YOU
- You are not the only one to doubt the academic/research path
- Be honest about your concerns
- Many experience relief

Conclusion

- “Changing careers is not a failure; it often requires more courage than continuing in the expected direction and can lead to much greater personal development.” - Anita Crafts-Lighty
- “The PhD is good training for a professional life. For me, it was my entrée into the culture of physics and the first step to [my current job].” P.W. Hammer, American Institute of Physics

Questions?

April 28, 9am Pacific – Careers Away from the Bench webinar
discussion

Visit sciencecareers.org/webinar for more info

Slides will be available for download at:
sciencecareers.org/outreach