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Title: Director, Graduate Student Academic and Professional Development

Field: Higher Education Administration

Institution: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, The Graduate School

Describe a typical day?

There is no typical day and this also depends on the time of year. Since I am in an academic setting, I have to be adaptable to intense action for 9 months, then switch gears and concentrate on other projects during the summer, primarily planning for the next academic year. Each day is a balance of communication, planning, data collection, management, and critical thinking. Some days will involve all communication, following up on loose ends, contacting people, and teaching. Whereas some days may include travel and talking with undergraduates interested in graduate studies. Other days include working on reports, managing office needs, balancing budgets, writing grants, and planning larger projects.

What do you enjoy most?

Being able to combine my skill set as a bench scientist and applying what I have learned to new challenges. I always look forward to learning new skills and knowledge. Satisfaction is usually more immediate than being at the bench.

What are some of the challenges?

Coordinating and putting all the pieces together. Keeping programs sustainable. Finding the right expertise for programming needs. Aligning needs of stakeholders with what we can offer. Dealing with unanticipated situations and issues that arise. Ensuring policies are implemented fairly and equally. Learning something new will automatically make you the "resident expert," expect that others will turn to when they run into the same issues.

What is the biggest misconception about your career field?

That administration is all about paperwork and there is no creativity involved. Every job involves paperwork and documentation. However, in my current position, there are a lot of people skills involved, collaboration, creativity, etc. which really is at the heart of a successful professional regardless of what you're doing.

How did you find out about your current position?

I have been working in the Graduate School for a year when this position became available. I didn't even think about applying for the position since I was not interested in getting more involved with management responsibilities. However, as it turns out, I was an ideal fit for the position. I think my reliability, communication skills, initiative, and work ethic translated into others being confident in my ability to fulfill the job's responsibilities.

What strategies or resources did you find most helpful during your job search?

By far personal contacts are important. Don't just keep them in your "contacts list." Actively follow-up with people periodically, update them on what you're doing. You will be amazed how you can use your network, not just for career advancement, but as people you can call on for mutual assistance.

How long was your job search?

I wasn't seeking out a position at the time. Serendipity happens, keep your eyes open for possibilities. Use each opportunity as a learning experience. There is no single, straight path in a career.

Looking back on your time as a postdoc or your job search, what do you wish you would have done differently?

As both a graduate student and a postdoc – meeting people outside of my field. Since I was always interested in "alternative careers," it was hard to meet people outside of science so I didn't meet many which I should have done earlier on.

What career planning and/or job search advice do you have for current postdocs interested in your career field?

Think about what is important for you – everything is negotiable...don't just think about negotiating salary. Think about responsibilities you could negotiate, where you could ask for additional assistance in fulfilling job responsibilities, prioritize your responsibilities and make sure your employer knows these priorities, and pitch your negotiation strategies to address how all of these points can be mutually beneficial to you and your employer.

Think big picture – get out and meet people, continue to make connections. Continue reading in your field but also broaden the scope of what you read. You will find lots of useful information that directly applies to your current job position in other fields. Learn the language of other disciplines, it will take you far and will solidify your competence in dealing with others.

Keep your CV current. You never know when an opportunity will arise.