Eric Ganko

Department - Biology
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Title: Computational Biologist
Company: Syngenta, RTP, NC

Describe a typical day?

I'm in a research position, so most of my day is spent working with sequence data for various projects. Projects can come from several sources – support for research taking place in our NC office, or support for projects hosted by our offices in the US Midwest, Europe or Asia. Some recent projects involve evaluating new software. In a given week I typically have one or two meetings a day, often a combination of in-person and teleconference, for the planning and tracking of these projects. A portion of my time is also devoted to consulting, where I'll advise bench-based researchers on smaller data analysis and computational issues. These are usually ad-hoc, and initiated by an email or visit to my desk.

What do you enjoy most?

I have my set of responsibilities, and I'm given a lot of freedom to get the job done. Plus, I think my co-workers, and Syngenta in general, have a good balance of work and life. People work hard, but they can leave it at the office. I think my favorite part is that I still get to spend the majority of my day working on interesting scientific problems. It's very satisfying to see my work have immediate use without the long delay that usually occurs between research and publication.

What are some of the challenges?

My position is new, so it took some time to figure out my responsibilities. I've learned that consensus and collaboration are more important in Syngenta then I've experienced in academia- often this is good, but it can be frustrating. It's also been rather new for me to have never met many co-workers in person, as they are in different offices.

What is the biggest misconception about your career field?

Most people don't know what a computational biologist does!

How did you find out about your current position?

I wanted to stay in the area, so I primarily watched local job boards such as the NC Biotech Center and specific company websites.

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

Dara helped me tweak my non-academic CV. Also, the OPA sessions on interviewing and other job skills are just as useful for jobs in industry as they are in academia.

How long was your job search?

About 7 months.

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

I had a wide range of training as a postdoc, including teaching and technology, and I use nearly all those skills in my current position. Research skills are important, but don't be afraid to pursue additional non-lab training too.

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

- In my earlier interviews for other jobs in RTP, I wish I had a better idea of the actual skills desired for certain jobs. Quite often, a job ad is watered down by the time it hits the public- if you get a phone interview somewhere, ask questions about the position.

- Attend some of the UNC postdoc workshops, and try the EPA/NIEHS postdoc fair in the spring. These can be a good way to start building a network.

- Finally, communication skills are crucial – it's absolutely expected that you can speak and write clearly. During my job search I also had several academic interviews, and I found them to be much longer but less focused. The questions raised during the in-person industry interviews tended to more focused and detailed.