

# naturejobs

**JOBS OF  
THE WEEK**

“It’s your degree,” Nicole Christacos told the audience of postdocs. “Do with it what you want.” Christacos, a cytogeneticist at Quest Diagnostics in Madison, New Jersey, was speaking at a postdoc careers symposium held last week in Washington DC by the American Society for Cell Biology, and she emphasized this mantra more than once. It’s one that makes perfect sense.

The panellists at the meeting shared their success stories, describing how they used their degrees to get the jobs they wanted. Christacos went into industry despite a lack of encouragement from her peers. Kavita Berger, who has a PhD in medical genetics, was determined to get into science policy. After unsuccessfully seeking jobs in government, she was ready to settle for an internship at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, but was told she was overqualified. Fortunately, another position opened up in the association’s Center for Science, Technology and Security Policy. Her move to Washington DC and networking with others in policy has helped her to further her career.

And John LeGuyader became a patent examiner at the United States Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) after leaving academia and deciding high-school teaching wasn’t for him. He thought he might go to law school, but a mentor encouraged him to approach the PTO first, as the office often pays for employees to attend law school. Seventeen years later, he has had a stimulating and stable career at the PTO — although he never made it to law school. LeGuyader used his training and technical know-how to make a career determining what is patentable and why.

No matter how many times graduate students hear about worsening job prospects in academia and the importance of alternative career paths, the regimented structure for advancement in academic science tends to make young scientists defer to sometimes short-sighted mentors on their career direction. This could close off avenues to industry or other ‘alternative’ careers. But as the panellists made clear, if you maintain your awareness of alternative paths and remain steadfast, you can use your degree to get the career you want.

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