

occasional outreach work at a science museum during a postdoc at DESY, Germany's high-energy physics laboratory in Hamburg. "It's probably getting more and more difficult to get into the field the way I did," he says. Increasingly, he says, institutions looking to hire scientists for PIO positions will require candidates to have at least some formal writing training.

Many universities offer science-writing or communication programmes, giving scientists a chance to hone their writing skills and upgrade their résumés. Some programmes focus on journalism, but others offer specific instruction for PR and PIO work (see 'Training the communicators').

COVERING THE FIELD

Immediately after obtaining her doctorate in 2005 in materials science from the University of California, Santa Barbara, Aditi Risbud started the one-year science-communication course at the University of California, Santa Cruz. "I couldn't see myself loving research enough to make it my career," she says. "I knew I wanted to get into the PR field."

As part of her time at Santa Cruz, Risbud interned at the communications office of Stanford Medical Center in California, where she wrote press releases and stories about all sorts of medical research. After graduation, she was hired by Orrico at Weber Shandwick. Among other things, she was soon writing 15-page primers on tumour angiogenesis and treatments for multiple sclerosis. "I had to give myself an education in the medical field," she says. "I bought textbooks."

Risbud, who now works as a PIO in the College of Engineering at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, recently wrote about electrical engineers who used an inexpensive inkjet printer to create microscopic 'plasmonic' structures that make it possible to use light beams to transmit data over metal surfaces. In an interview with Ajay Nahata, a professor of engineering and computer engineering at the university, Risbud got the type of quote that was guaranteed to get a reporter's attention. Plasmonic devices, Nahata told her, "have the potential to make wireless devices such as Bluetooth 1,000 times faster than they are today".

From medicine to engineering — that sort of versatility is the hallmark of a good PIO. "I was always intimidated interviewing scientists," says Meredith, "but then a very prominent astronomer told me that she was in awe of PIOs because we have so many areas of expertise. That was gratifying." ■

Chris Woolston is a freelance writer based in Billings, Montana, and a graduate of the science-communication programme at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

COLUMN

Choosing to stay

Saying no to a move is not easy, but there could be some very good reasons to stay put, says **Yoshimi Rii**.

As a graduate student contemplating a possible postdoc position, I have a constraint that I don't like to admit: I'd prefer not to move. Some may say that declining to be mobile is a cardinal career sin for young scientists. But I have my reasons.

By the end of their doctoral programme, many students acquire not only research experience but also personal achievements: long-term partners, a set of great friends, perhaps a mortgage and maybe children. Yet many move — to another state, another nation, another continent — to pursue fellowships and research labs in the hope of positioning themselves for a future faculty job (see *Nature* 490, 326–329, 2012). There's often more to their motivation than a sense of adventure — many universities shy away from hiring graduates from their own departments for new faculty positions. I have sat on faculty candidate-search committees and witnessed many qualified local candidates outcompeted by those who had ventured to labs far and wide.

If I were willing to be mobile, exotic and exciting opportunities would abound. At the Ocean Sciences Meeting in Hawaii in February, a researcher at the poster session invited me to do a postdoc in Chile. Although I entertained the idea for a few days, I knew that Chile wasn't going to happen. I have a husband who was recently made a supervisor in his job, and a great group of friends. But the real deal-breaker is that my mother and sister live here in Honolulu.

My mother is the healthiest 78-year-old I know, and yet, when I consider going away for even a year, I am paralysed by the fear of lost time. I hope to start a family in the next couple of years, and I want to maximize every moment my future family and I will have with my mum.

By choosing to prioritize geographical location for family reasons, I feel as if I am closing the door on academia. When I started to consider alternative career paths, I feared that my search for local career choices would severely narrow the scope, especially if I wanted to continue doing research. But I'm noticing that there are plenty of options if I think creatively about how to use my degree (see *Nature* 494, 393; 2013).

With uncanny timing, I recently saw an announcement for a teaching chair at my old high school, a prestigious school with bright students. My former biology teacher is retiring after 52 years, and the school wants someone



ORLA SHUTTERSTOCK

to implement a research programme in its new laboratory facility. I would be able to educate young students and instil in them a love for the ocean. I would get to stay 'at the bench' and stay at home — seems like a win-win. Still, I hesitated to apply.

First, my lack of exposure to alternative careers in graduate school makes them seem less worthwhile than a gloried professorship. I still hear people say, 'Oh, so-and-so won't make it in academia.' Such language perpetuates the unrealistic expectation that every PhD graduate should become a professor.

Second, part of me feels as if I'm making this decision for my family, and deliberately surrendering my future identity as an oceanographer or a scientist. I find myself fantasizing about an international postdoc or months at Palmer Station in Antarctica. Occasionally I wish I could become my adviser's mini-me.

In the end, choosing an alternative career is less about sacrifice and more about finally being in the position to take care of people other than myself. I'd like to give my mother some freedom to finally live her life, after she has heroically taken care of my special-needs sister for the past 40 years (not to mention a 34-year-old still in graduate school). I guess my feelings as a daughter supersede my drive as a young academic.

I decided to apply for the teaching chair. Nervous but excited, I hope for good news. Saying no to moving may close some doors, but it will open others, both personal and professional. ■

Yoshimi Rii is a fifth-year PhD candidate in the School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology, University of Hawaii at Manoa.