

GRADUATE JOURNAL

Moving on

With a sense of sadness, I write my last journal entry from the United States. I'm moving on. In a month I'm going back to London where my journey began.

When I departed for the United States, I left behind a relationship, family and friends, a familiar life and a country I knew. Boarding that plane, I was both apprehensive and excited. I had planned to stay for a year. In the end, I stayed for two.

Needless to say, making a new life in another country isn't the easiest of tasks. But I very quickly settled in, made a home for myself and found new friends.

The experience has taught me many things, and is one I won't forget. What will I miss the most? Without doubt, the people. My wild and wacky physicist friends will be with me for ever! Their kindness, generosity and *joie de vivre* have taught me to be a better person. It is a rare treat to work with people from all over the globe and to discover friendships that cross the boundaries of culture. Four o'clock teatime will never again be the same without at least six different nationalities round the table...

Leaving your roots isn't easy. Neither is going back. But there are many things to tempt me home: good food, the BBC, public transport... And so a new journey begins. See you on the other side of the Atlantic. ■

Amber Jenkins is a graduate student in particle physics at Imperial College, London, doing thesis research at Fermilab in Batavia, Illinois.

Dual competencies

As biotechnology companies grow, they tend to develop their operational and management team by bringing in people who have dual competencies — formal qualifications in both science and business.

Such skill sets are attractive to companies because they allow them to expand their existing competencies without needing to employ a huge number of people. They can also aid communication between research-based innovation and administrative support.

For scientists, having dual competencies can accelerate their career path — especially in the private sector. This tends to mean greater management responsibility — and usually higher salaries — than their bench-bound colleagues.

But for many of these high-fliers, the move into

management will spell the end of lab work, leaving them facing an office-based future. Indeed, researchers and engineers who will have studied for 5–8 years for their scientific qualifications very often quit their lab-based posts after just one year of business school. This is a sad situation, as the skills that they are gaining in business readily translate into the world of research.

For example, a knowledge of accounting and finance is essential in product development for understanding investment, value and the return on investment. Similarly, skills in the management of human resources will aid the planning and recruitment processes to get projects up and running.

At Protein'eXpert, a biotech firm in Grenoble, France, we have sought to tackle this with our strategy of employing or shaping (on-the-job education)

people with dual skill sets. Of the six members of the management team, five have both science and business qualifications — the exception is the marketing manager. Although both the chief executive and director for intellectual property and quality control have left the bench behind them, the other three dually skilled managers all make use of their newly acquired business skills to guide scientific projects.

Whether they are used to change career direction, or simply to enrich the current path, dual competencies represent a challenging opportunity for scientists. The acquisition of business skills should be encouraged — both at universities and in the workplace as they can bring huge value to scientific projects. ■

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♦ www.proteinexpert.com

MOVERS Mark Willenbring, director, division of treatment and recovery research, US National Institute on Drug Abuse and Alcoholism, Bethesda, Maryland



Despite Mark Willenbring's best efforts early in his career to avoid becoming a specialist, the psychiatrist soon found himself identified as the 'alcohol guy'.

During his training, internship and residencies, Willenbring had liked the idea of exploring his broad interests in clinical psychiatry as an academic, splitting his time between teaching, administration and research. But in the last year of Willenbring's residency, while he was seeking his next post, a

colleague suggested that he should consider moving into the treatment and research of alcohol and drug addiction. He was told that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) was offering career teaching grants in alcohol and drug-abuse research. Willenbring applied and, although in the end he decided not to accept the grant, going through the process got him pegged as an "alcohol and drug expert", he says.

This reputation helped him to secure a fellowship at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where he got involved in developing a curriculum in addictions and their treatment. Doing that helped him to become the specialist that the university thought he was and that he had initially resisted becoming.

By then up to speed in addiction psychiatry, Willenbring further expanded his experience by working at the Dane County alcohol detoxification centre. This reshaped his view of alcoholism,

leading him to see it as a chronic illness. As a result, he sought ways to treat the condition rather than trying to find a complete cure. He describes his major research focus as "populations of people everyone has given up on".

Willenbring, who last month moved from the University of Minnesota to become director of treatment and recovery research at the US National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, says that when he began his career, the market trend towards hiring specialists was just beginning. He wonders now whether broad-based experience should be viewed in a more positive light — especially as science and medicine are becoming more interdisciplinary.

A mixture of experiences can be helpful if you have to manage large projects. And Willenbring will be drawing on his generalist beginnings as he finds his feet as the 'alcohol guy' at the NIH. ■

CV **1982–2004:** Veteran's Affairs Medical Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, rising to director, addictive disorders section (1991)
1980–82: Medical director, Dane County Alcohol Detoxification Unit, Madison, Wisconsin
1980–82: Staff psychiatrist, Dane County Mental Health Center, Madison, Wisconsin
1977–80: Staff physician, Kaiser Medical Center, Sacramento, California