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MOVERS

Eric Staeva-Vieira, business analyst, Rodman and Renshaw, New York

2003–05: Programme manager, Science Alliance, New York Academy of Sciences
1998–2003: Researcher, Skirball Institute, New York University Medical Center, New York
1996–98: Senior research technician, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York

Most scientists approach their craft with a tight focus on a particular area of science. But a few, such as Eric Staeva-Vieira, take a broader view, trawling the vast sea of science to understand its role in society. In plotting his own course, Staeva-Vieira has helped make the less-travelled route a little easier for like-minded scientists.

When Staeva-Vieira was an undergraduate studying molecular biology, an adviser handed him a copy of *The Coming Plague* by Laurie Garrett, which sparked his interest in public health and emerging diseases. This led him to start a doctorate in parasitology at New York University's School of Medicine. While there, he became so intrigued with the impact that the Human Genome Project could have on drug and therapy development that he completed a PhD in developmental genetics.

To understand not only the scientific but also the ethical and social implications of the project, he sought the counsel of the university's famed science-and-society expert Dorothy Nelkin — a move that confirmed his broad view of science. "I think scientists should be more involved in politics, business and legal discussions," says Staeva-Vieira.

Eager to show the impact that non-bench scientists can have — and help graduate students and postdocs grapple with similar career issues — he took a position as manager of the Science Alliance career-development programme at the New York Academy of Sciences. There, he helped to create a successful business training course, and sought to dismiss the myth that career transitions require multiple degrees. Courses in finance and economics helped to prepare him for his role at Rodman and Renshaw, an early-stage technology-investment firm in New York.

"My goal is to get an inside view of industry," he says, adding that gaining insight into early-stage technologies, such as therapies using RNA interference, is exciting.

"I look for opportunities," Staeva-Vieira says. "I'm constantly trying to figure out what skill set I should get next." His ultimate goal, he says — combining all the skills he's honed throughout his career — will probably be a position in the nexus between the non-profit and for-profit world, seeking solutions to global health problems.

A firm believer that scientists can contribute more than R&D, he says that the decision to pursue a non-traditional track is a difficult one, fraught with fear of the unknown. "The challenge," he says, "is staying true to your gut." And recognizing when, if you stayed on the traditional path, you'd be a fish out of water. ■

RECRUITERS & ACADEMIA

A class act

When the women's studies department at Duke University asked us — two graduate students in the environmental sciences programme — if we could design and teach a class about gender and environmental science, we jumped at the chance. Given how much coverage there has been about women in science, we were curious to explore how gender might affect environmental problems and solutions.

There were three other reasons we pursued this opportunity. First, we wanted to experience the entire teaching process from designing to teaching to evaluation. We had worked as teaching assistants, but were involved mainly in administrative tasks. We wanted to discover how to balance research needs with preparing and teaching a class. We shared ideas and split up tasks, began preparations a year ahead, and used flexible periods, including the summer session and December.

Second, we wanted to experiment with the latest teaching techniques, including active learning, where the focus is on engaging students in the process. In our class we explored several methods such as class discussions, role-plays and small-group activities. A scenario about a community exposed to high levels of pesticides emphasized the complexity of environmental problems. In small groups, students prepared a budget to balance the community's medical needs with the longer-term benefits of toxicology research. This realistic environmental problem showed students how difficult it can be to meet both scientific and societal goals.

Third, we welcomed the challenge of teaching an interdisciplinary class. Environmental problems are complex because they involve the interaction between the environment and people. By the end of the semester the entire class agreed that gender plays an important role. A gender perspective can inform our analysis of the problems and help us carry out solutions.

From this teaching experience, we realized that perspectives from a variety of disciplines can provide context for the issues and should be included in environmental-science curricula.

Mid-way through our PhD programme, we had lost the larger context of our research. Exploring an interdisciplinary topic with enthusiastic students revitalized us. Teaching this class took a great deal of time and effort, but it was also one of our most rewarding and inspiring experiences. ■

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GRADUATE JOURNAL

A tale of a whale

It's been two months since I defended my PhD and I have temporarily escaped to a place where people don't ask where you're doing your postdoc: Alaska. With the hope of clearing our minds and catching some fish, another recent graduate and I headed up north. If you love the outdoors, there's just no better place than here.

So far, the trip is not pushing the reset button for my stresses in the way I thought it would, but perhaps that was too much to expect. I still wake up with mini-panics about this past year and the one to come. All neuroses aside, it has been an amazing journey and I'm feeding upon the wonders of nature everywhere we go. I've experienced a few salient moments of clarity too.

One day, I awoke stressed about the hiking boots I had left on a river bank and cursed my forgetfulness. Then, as I was kayaking in Tutka Bay near Homer, I watched a humpback whale leap from the brine in a full breach. It was an astounding sight and I was instantly healed from that little stress attack about some dumb pair of boots. I laughed as I realized that one can always buy new boots, but experiences like that are priceless. Hopefully I can re-enter my career remembering not to sweat about the small stuff, as there's big stuff like whales that deserve far more attention. ■

Jason Underwood completed his PhD in molecular biology at the University of California, Los Angeles, in June.