

MOVERS

Nancy Kelley, senior vice-president, Alexandria Real Estate Equities, Boston, Massachusetts



2001-04: Senior vice-president, Spaulding & Slye and Colliers International, Boston

1996-2001: Founder, chief executive, director and adviser, for various healthcare and technology start-ups

1989-96: Junior partner, Hale and Dorr, Boston

1988-89: White House Fellow and special assistant to the US Trade Representative

Back in 1980, Nancy Kelley, a mother of three young daughters, was a student at Manchester Community College in Connecticut. She could sense that some faculty members and students were judging her as “a teenage mother who would never become anything”, she says. So she set out to prove them wrong.

Kelley excelled at national politics, intellectual-property law and business, a combination that helped her to launch a career in scientific real estate. She graduated from the college as the valedictorian of her class in two years and won a Truman Scholarship funded by Congress. She became the first community-college student to transfer to Yale College, and was accepted on to a joint graduate programme at Harvard Law School and the John F. Kennedy School of Government. This led Kelley to the White House, where she secured a position as a White House Fellow and a special assistant to the US Trade Representative.

During her stint at the White House, Kelley specialized in global trade negotiations and the protection of intellectual property. That experience helped her move into the scientific arena.

In the early 1990s, she joined the law firm Hale and Dorr in Boston as a corporate securities lawyer. There she helped to build management teams, oversee venture-capital negotiations, create R&D alliances and take some companies public.

After she left to build and finance some companies of her own — Spaulding & Slye and Colliers International — a commercial real-estate company approached her about starting its life-sciences practice. Kelley was initially wary. “I’d never been in real estate and had no interest in it,” she says. But when she signed on with Spaulding & Slye to help the company write its life-sciences business plan, she realized that there was a huge untapped market for a specialized kind of real estate — housing science.

She says that she was lured to Alexandria Real Estate Equities partly because she will have a chance to work at a company focused solely on building, owning and managing creative environments for science, including New York’s recently announced East River Science Park.

Kelley says that the key to her climb from community college to real-estate mogul was keeping her priorities straight and taking chances. She focused first on her family. “I did as best I could as new opportunities presented themselves,” she says. ■

Paul Smaglik

SCIENTISTS & SOCIETIES

An easier route to employment

The Academic Employment Initiative (AEI) launched recently by the American Chemical Society (ACS) aims to create a broader and more inclusive system for universities and colleges to recruit faculty members. A poster session enables recruiters to meet a wider range of candidates in less formal settings before invitations for campus visits are issued.

Casting this wider net increases the chances for greater diversity among candidates and for finding better matches between candidates and institutions. In addition, an interactive panel-audience discussion sets up a dialogue among candidates, recruiters and recently hired faculty members.

The AEI poster session is the heart of the programme and takes place at the ACS’s autumn meeting. At this meeting two months ago in Washington DC, more than 170 graduate students and postdoctoral candidates presented their research results as well as plans for future research and teaching. The poster session was held in the evening with snacks and drinks available.

Faculty members looking to hire met and talked with several prospective candidates in an informal, low-pressure setting without the cost of a recruiting visit. And the candidates had the opportunity to meet each other and

share their hopes and anxieties.

The panel-audience discussion is held at the spring national meeting and helps prepare candidates for the recruiting process. During most of the three-hour session, experienced and recently hired faculty members answer questions from the audience about such topics as how to put together a good application and how to prepare for the interview process.

As a measure of the programme’s success, the AEI poster session grew from about 120 candidates and 80 faculty recruiters in 2004 to more than 170 candidates and aisles brimming with faculty members in 2005. Job-seekers reported that they learned about opportunities they had not previously considered, but which still met their career goals.

Now that the two-year pilot test of the AEI, funded by the National Science Foundation, is complete, the ACS has decided to adopt and fund it. Because of its informal and relaxed atmosphere, the AEI reduces stress on both sides and provides a good mutual introduction for candidates and departments. Questions or comments can be directed to GradEd@acs.org. ■

Charles Casey is Immediate Past President of the American Chemical Society; Jerry Bell is senior scientist in the ACS Education Division.

GRADUATE JOURNAL

The worry of success

My dream title of professor arrives in January, but only for a short while. I thought it was a reach when I applied for a temporary position at a prestigious liberal-arts college and was elated when I got the offer. It’s my chance to test-drive the career I’ve sought for almost a decade. What could be more perfect?

I am excited about this unique opportunity but, strangely, I still spend far too much time worrying. Accepting this job is a bold step, but I’m already concerned about the next step. If I enjoy the liberal-arts job, I’ll still need to do a postdoc, kick-start a research project and then apply for tenure-track jobs at this or other colleges. Although more focused on teaching than research, liberal-arts colleges still expect professors to set up a lab where undergraduates can do semi-independent research. As these jobs don’t bring in a lot of grant money or start-up funds right away, this creates a tricky catch. A candidate’s research needs to be ‘hot’ enough for the candidate to get the job, yet cheap enough for him or her to be able to do it at the college.

So, there you have it. The worry circle continues. I haven’t taught a single class at the college yet, but already I’m tortured with choosing a research area that will land the tenure-track gig, which I anticipate I’ll want. Perhaps this is actually a sign of my confidence? I am confident that next semester will be really fun. ■

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