

# Craig Stewart

Senior Geologist at Cotton, Shires and Associates



## **What is your current occupation?**

I am a Senior Geologist at Cotton, Shires and Associates where I manage most of our geologic and geotechnical peer review services and perform engineering geologic investigations for local municipalities and utility providers.

## **What is your educational background?**

I have a BS in Geology from Appalachian State University and a MS in Geology from California State University Northridge. I am also licensed as a Professional Geologist in the State of California.

## **A key message for students is that the geoscience workforce is dynamic, and boundaries between sectors and occupations are fluid. How has this been true in your career?**

I started my current career path directly out of graduate school. In my role, I work closely with local governments as a private consultant. However, I have peers who are employed in similar positions directly within local government agencies. What I and my peers do in the geoscience workforce is enforce and uphold laws and regulations regarding seismic hazards like landslides and earthquake fault rupture.

For me, it is most important to recognize evolution in the geosciences in terms of the tools we can use to better solve geologic problems. I have to adapt and collaborate with those around me. We have to continue developing tools and practices, and understand current codes in my work.

**Where do you see your sector moving in future years? How would you advise students to prepare to be competitive job applicants and successful employees?**

I would advise students to pay careful attention to their course schedule and understand the skills they have developed while in school. I think it is important to understand that recent graduates have high technical knowledge in the specific courses they completed. Recent graduates also have developed an overall toolkit to apply to geologic problems. I recommend students embrace and better understand their individual education paths and resultant unique toolkits.

I see more and more of the engineering geology field and State licensing board embracing GIS and remote sensing techniques under their purview. If students have interest in the field, I recommend they make sure to take a few classes on those subjects.

**What is the role of networking in your sector? Do you have advice for a student who is just beginning to build their network? What is the best way for students to get their foot in the door?**

Networking can be very important in the private consulting sector. I would recommend joining and attending applicable professional society meetings. Introductions or announcements are commonly made about new openings and positions at different firms at local meetings.

**What does a “typical” day of work look like for you?**

I typically split my weeks between office analysis and field reconnaissance's. I find myself most productive in the mornings where I respond to questions from local governments and clients, research the geology of different projects, and complete some report writing. I may spend an afternoon in the field mapping various sites where subdivisions, buildings, or utilities are proposed. I may also have to respond quickly to emergency situations where a roadway is subject to landsliding.

**What is the best part of your job?**

My job affords me the chance to get an up-close view of the geology of many small cities and towns. I most enjoy getting to know the specific geology of the communities I work with and working with government staff to address potential problems.

**Do you have any other comments or advice for students looking to enter your sector of the geoscience workforce?**

I also advise students to research professional certifications (e.g., PG, QSD, SAP evaluator etc..) they may be interested in. Many career paths are defined by these certifications, so making sure to meet the requirements in terms of coursework and eventual experience is very important.