

Kat Cantner

Science and Outreach Coordinator at the University of Minnesota



What is your current occupation?

I am the Science and Outreach Coordinator for the Continental Scientific Drilling (CSD) Facility in the Earth and Environmental Sciences Department at the University of Minnesota. This position covers a broad range of responsibilities and encourages flexibility and growth. The CSD Facility supports researchers interested in continental drilling and coring. We engage in hundreds of projects each year, from those conducted by individual graduate students to large multi-national projects. My role is to support researcher training and education, to facilitate project outreach by connecting researchers and communities, and to broaden the CSD Facility community through relationship building.

What is your educational background?

Bachelor of Arts in Geological Sciences and Old World Archaeology and Art at Brown University

Master of Science in Geological Oceanography from the Graduate School of Oceanography at the University of Rhode Island

Master's Certificate from the Science Illustration Program at California State University Monterey Bay

Professional societies, research institutes, colleges, and universities all provide continuing education opportunities. Sign up for their mailing lists and follow them on social media to stay informed. In such a quickly growing field, new software, technology, and methodologies are constantly being developed. Stay curious and keep learning. In addition to my formal education, I am an avid student of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, and I frequently attend workshops and webinars to continue my education.

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 alternated between different fields of study throughout my undergraduate education. This allowed me to build a strong support network of mentors and peers across many disciplines which in turn let me take creative risks with my academic life. My career path has also been strongly influenced by my life outside the classroom, as my hobbies, interests and social networks led to many seemingly disparate opportunities. Stay engaged in life beyond academia. Search online for interest groups to find new people who share your interests. I've networked through knitting circles, blacksmithing classes, cartography meetups, volunteer groups, and the local Maker Space. This range of engagement has been an asset in my career as the economy and workforce have changed. Exposure to different fields and industries has allowed me to diversify my skillset and broaden my perspectives.

I have worn many badges: archeologist, geologist, oceanographer, outreach scientist, illustrator, professor, science communicator. My career has developed organically through personal connections and discoveries. Much to the surprise of my marine research colleagues, I exchanged a microscope for a paintbrush when I learned about the Science Illustration Program at CSUMB. Armed with my newfound visual communication skills, I applied for an illustration internship with *EARTH Magazine* at the American Geosciences Institute – a position that did not exist until I requested it. When the magazine closed, I began teaching geology at the local community college, where I rediscovered my love of hands-on outreach. This galvanizing experience led me to my current position with the University of Minnesota.

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?

The field of science communication and outreach is growing as industry, government and academic institutions strive to connect with the communities around them. These positions are essential. In preparing for their careers, students often focus on academic success and devalue their other interests and life experiences. Each person's unique personal history and combination of interests influences their lens on the world. In the sciences we are taught to suppress our subjective, emotional selves. However, the more we embrace our humanity, the more open we are to connection with others – a vital skill for science communication.

Being honest about who you are and how you work will help you find roles that play to your strengths. Even failure teaches us how to adapt and find solutions. You can develop resiliency by

acknowledging your challenges in addition to your abilities as your experience increases. Pay attention to what motivates you and how you engage with your work and communicate that to your potential employers.

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?

As an undergraduate, I was asked by a friend to attend a public lecture on what I thought was an uninteresting subject. To my surprise, the lecturer presented on a research project that combined my fields of interest. I introduced myself after the lecture, organized a group visit to his lab, and remained in touch with his graduate students, eventually joining the lab as a marine research assistant after graduation. Creating concrete opportunities to engage and keeping in touch will familiarize you to people in your field. Additionally, reaching out to secondary contacts will not only build your network, but will keep you informed of new opportunities as they arise.

The majority of the positions I have held were gained through professional or social connections. In addition to attending professional conferences and events, participate in social meetings related to your non-academic interests. My teaching career began due to social connections I made at a rock climbing gym. Networking often leads to dead ends, but perseverance and diversifying your connections can also lead to surprising opportunities.

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

Variety has always been a connecting thread throughout my work, and I enjoy having multiple ongoing projects that require different skills or competencies. Although my projects rotate, I maintain structure in my day – a system I learned by working remotely for over a decade. I allocate two to three hours per project throughout the day and try to avoid multitasking. These time slots might involve working in the lab with researchers, designing websites, organizing community events, developing educational materials or products, attending meetings with colleagues and collaborators, and training on new software or lab procedures. Part of every day is dedicated to learning something new that will improve my work and develop my skills.

What is the best part of your job?

The best part of each of my jobs has been the opportunity to learn new skills and gain new perspectives. Successful communicators are attentive listeners. My position gives me the opportunity to listen to diverse voices and learn from other’s experiences. Being open and receptive to new ideas allows me to reevaluate my worldview and reframe my work. Change creates opportunities for growth.

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

Build a diverse network of support. The world is changing rapidly and the opportunities that present themselves may be difficult to recognize. Having a diverse support network will give you the encouragement to be receptive to new experiences.

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