

Kevin Harmon

Staff Geologist at Cotton, Shires and Associates



What is your current occupation?

As a Staff Geologist at Cotton, Shires and Associates (CSA) I have assisted with a variety of projects through collection, compilation, and analysis of geologic data, and preparation of technical maps and reports. As the lead GIS Analyst of CSA, I have worked extensively with Geographic Information Systems and frequently develop geologic, geohazard, and DTM maps.

What is your educational background?

I have a BS in Earth Sciences and a BA in Computer Science from University of California, Santa Cruz. I am 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 got my introduction to the geoscience workforce through an internship at CSA. After completing a couple courses to finish my degrees, I returned to CSA as a Staff Geologist where I have worked since. Throughout college and work, I have collaborated and learned from multiple students, professors, and professionals with unique and strong technical backgrounds. I have adapted to the evolving geoscience field by continuously trying to learn from these individuals and incorporating new skill sets along the way.

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 geotechnical industry is still in the early stages of making use of emerging technologies. Some of the most pertinent and powerful technologies that are underutilized in this field include: use of drones for surveying, online precision mapping, and InSAR (Interferometric Synthetic Aperture Radar) for mapping ground deformation. Knowing how to use any of these technologies will make an applicant unique and competitive.

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 beneficial when searching for a job. I recommend students should make an effort to get to know their classmates, teacher assistants, and professors as much as possible. A good and simple place to start is going to office hours and collaborating in sections and labs.

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

A typical work day for me is usually doing something different than the day before, whether that’s in the field or in the office. Typical field tasks include: topographic surveying, distress mapping, geologic mapping, floor level surveying, logging of exploratory boreholes and test pits, laboratory testing, earthwork observation and testing, and installation and monitoring of geotechnical instrumentation. Office tasks generally include analyzing geotechnical data and generating maps and report figures, along with collaborating with colleagues.

What is the best part of your job?

As shown above, the best part of my job is having a variety of different tasks to work on. This keeps work fresh and interesting and helps avoid getting burnt out.

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

Students should be proactive when they are ready to look for a job. I would recommend sending emails (along with your resume) to potential employers expressing your interest in the company, even if there are no “active openings”. Applying before the end of the school year may also give you an edge on other students who will be looking for similar jobs come graduation.

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