Samantha Carter

Scientist at Proctor & Gamble

Educational Background

Early in my college career, I switched majors a couple times. Coming out of high school, I enjoyed math and chemistry, so everyone suggested I major in chemical engineering. After a semester I didn't feel it was the right fit, so I changed to computer engineering. I stuck with that for a while. Although I enjoyed programming, I didn't enjoy the thought of working in front of a computer day in and day out for the rest of my life. I found my way to earth science in my junior year and really enjoyed it. Thinking I had wasted the first two years in undergrad learning skills I would never use, I was surprised how much math and chemistry played a role in my new major. I enjoyed geochemistry the most of my undergrad classes, so I decided to pursue that field for my master's and PhD degrees. Though my graduate research was primarily lab-focused, I was also able to do a modeling project that used my old programming skills. I've been able to incorporate my favorite subjects and apply them in an earth science context.

Job Search

I finished my PhD in Spring of 2020, in the peak of Covid unemployment issues. I started by applying to mainly postdoctoral positions and assistant professorships. Many of the positions I was applying for got cancelled due to hiring freezes or uncertain funding. I was fortunate enough to secure temporary job positions during this time that I enjoyed and helped me to continue to build my skillset. However, I was getting frustrated with not being able to find something permanent. I started to get more creative with my job search, thinking about what skills I had. I used those skills as keywords in job searches (e.g., instead of looking for "geochemist" I

searched for “mass spectrometry”) and eventually found myself in an interview for a Scientist position with Procter and Gamble. At this point, after countless interviews, I was feeling the job search fatigue and having a tough time getting excited about new leads. However, the more my interviewers taught me about P&G and the position, the more I got excited about the prospect of working as a scientist outside of academia, something I hadn’t initially considered.

Current Position

I am a chemist for Procter and Gamble. My group works in trace element chemistry, using the same skills and types of instruments I used in my graduate work. We handle a variety of problems brought to us from other departments within P&G. These can range from a product not performing as expected (“This is turning pink and we don’t know why”), to making sure our products do not have anything dangerous such as mercury or lead in them, to helping optimize new products before they get launched. I spend most of my time split between working in the lab processing/analyzing the samples we receive and writing up the results in short reports that go back to the customer. I also spend some time talking to customers to figure out if and how our lab can help with a problem they’re having, as well as learning new methods and planning how best to solve those problems.

Key Skills for My Job

When I accepted the position at P&G, I was a little worried I wouldn’t be prepared for it – a bit of new hire imposter syndrome. However, this was not the case at all. The lab and instrumentation skills I picked up in grad school were exactly what I needed to succeed at my new job. There was a lot to learn, of course, but it was learning how skills I already had would be applied in a different way. This included the hard skills like lab work and sample analysis, but a lot of those “soft skills” you pick up along the way as well. Problem solving and writing clearly and concisely are the two that I feel I use most often.

Best Part of My Job

I enjoy the variety of projects that I get to do at P&G. We have a huge variety of consumer products that require different analytical techniques and problem solving. It is exciting to be a part of the success of our products. I am currently working with a team to help optimize a new product and it has been interesting to see how this is done and how much science goes into the claims you see on products at the store.

Advice for Geoscience Students

In the job search, keep an open mind and focus more on the skills you have gained rather than a specific job title or field. You may be surprised by the opportunities out there that need skills from an earth science degree. When I was doing my graduate work, I never thought I would end up working for a consumer goods company. But there is an amazing amount of advanced science that is applied and I have thoroughly enjoyed my job so far.

Connect with me:

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me!

Email: scarter514@gmail.com

Twitter: @SamPaleoWise

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/samantha-carter-789629b1/