

Wendy Bohon

Senior Science Communication Specialist for the Incorporated Research
Institutions for Seismology



What is your current occupation?

I am a geologist and the Senior Science Communication Specialist for the Incorporated Research Institutions for Seismology. I am responsible for most of the outward facing parts of IRIS, including the website content (science writing), social media and museum displays. I also do lots of public speaking, including teaching people about earthquakes, talking to kids about science and training scientists about how to speak to the media.

What is your educational background?

I have a BA in Theatre and Geology and an MSc and PhD in Geology. I'm also a trained Public Information Officer (PIO) as well as an If/Then Science Ambassador.

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 career as a professional actress in Hollywood, but then I felt the Hector Mine earthquake and it changed my life! I started volunteering for the USGS Earthquake hazards Program in Pasadena and was eventually hired there as the Outreach and Education Coordinator for Southern California. I loved the work but wanted to learn more, so while working I started attending a community college to improve my math and science skills. From there, I got a

Master's degree and a PhD in geology and I have worked on faults all over the world, including in India, Argentina and Bolivia. Currently I have gone back to my outreach roots and I'm working at the intersection of science and education for the Incorporated Research Institutions for Seismology.

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?

Nothing you learn is ever wasted and your unique set of skills and interests can be leveraged to make you competitive. Also, make sure that you are a good writer and communicator, because it doesn't matter if you have amazing ideas if you can't communicate them.

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 is critical, and it isn't just schmoozing. Your friends, your fellow students, your professors – all of these folks are part of your broader network. In particular, your friends and fellow students will likely be with you throughout your career, so work hard to foster authentic and strong relationships with them. A lot of important opportunities come from unexpected places so always keep an open mind and push yourself to meet new people both in your field and outside of it.

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

None of my days are typical! Some days I have meetings and emails, other days I'm giving talks or writing stories highlighting exciting new discoveries and some days there will be a large or interesting earthquake and I'm doing TV and radio interviews. Every day is different and that's one thing I really love about my job!

What is the best part of your job?

I really love helping people understand earthquakes. Earthquakes can be frightening and understanding where and why they happen can help alleviate the stress and anxiety that people feel about them. I also love the exploration and discovery part. As a scientist you ask questions and then spend your time trying to figure out the answers, and sometimes you discover something that was totally unknown! There is so much we don't know and being part of the generation of new knowledge is a thrill and a privilege.

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

“Soft skills” are actually critical skills and they require effort, practice and training. Work on your writing and your public speaking. Get active on social media. Write a blog. Practice communicating difficult concepts with your friends in different fields. All of these things will help you be a good science communicator, which will be helpful no matter what you do.

Connect

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/wendybohon/>

Learn More:

Website - <https://drwendybohon.com>

NPR Interview - <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1019335731>

Article - <https://500womenscientists.org/updates/2017/5/7/shatter-the-glass-ceiling>

If/Then Bio - <https://ifthenexhibit.org/ambassador/A-24/>