



Erica Jonlin: Regulatory affairs in academia

At our October Bioscience Careers Seminar, we had Dr. Erica Jonlin tell us about her experiences in regulatory affairs. Erica has spent the last 20+ years in various regulatory positions at UW, from the NIH-funded UW Program of Excellence in Gene Therapy, to working on individual translation research grants, to her current position with the UW Institute for Stem Cell and Regenerative Medicine and the Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology. Erica's description of her current role sounded a bit entrepreneurial as she often works on multiple projects at a time and is constantly looking for newly funded projects that could benefit from her expertise. She helps investigators move research towards commercialization by navigating regulatory pathways. In addition to her main projects, Erica also regularly lectures and publishes on ethical conundrums in human subjects research and stem cell research.

Dr. Jonlin received her PhD in biochemistry from UCLA. While in her program, she realized that she loved working in the sciences and getting into the weeds of medical genetics and stem cell and gene therapies, but she didn't enjoy working at a bench. This led to some soul searching (Erica recommends *What Color Is Your Parachute* by Richard Bolles). After thinking about her strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, and characteristics of her optimal work environment, Erica made a plan to finish her PhD and gain additional skills in scientific writing and policy to become more marketable after graduating. She wrote scientific articles for the school newspaper, interned at the campus women's resource center, educated the public about the use of animals in research, and began leveraging her responsibilities as a PhD student as translatable soft skills.

These efforts led her to an AAAS Science and Diplomacy Fellowship in Washington, D.C. where she worked at the U.S. Agency for International Development. This involved working in the science policy and regulation space. She had a few different jobs over the next few years. One was found through an advertisement that she had applied for. She was recruited for another because her name was in the American Chemical Society database. Other career changes were influenced by her personal life and creating a family. Her message was that it is impossible to predict where your next opportunity may come from. Eventually she moved to Seattle without a job lined up, and worked to carve out a niche for herself at UW that lined up with her interests and goals.

Throughout the talk, Erica had a few key takeaways and pieces of advice for graduate students looking for their next steps.

1. Earning a PhD can be ambiguous. As you are here for longer, you become a better scientist. It is helpful to have your next opportunity lined up (post-doc or a job) to structure the end of your program.

2. There are unorthodox ways to network that may be more comfortable if you are not used to meeting people at fairs or conferences. Erica would volunteer to join boards, work registration booths at events, or perform other tasks that helped you build a reputation for yourself while staying out of the spotlight.
3. Lastly, it is ok to do a job because you love the process of the work. Don't just focus on the outcome.