



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

College of Letters & Science

Alumni Spotlight

This month's Spotlight features Noëlle, a former Environmental Studies major who, after a time in environmental consulting, now designs and teaches courses to prepare the next generation for saving the world.

Noëlle Boucquey
Assistant Professor



What are you up to now, post-graduation?

I'm an assistant professor of Environmental Studies at Eckerd College, a small liberal arts college in Florida. I've developed courses that focus on themes like wild-life policy and fisheries management issues. Within these themes we discuss issues that matter—like how we can address climate change while allowing for human development, or how we define 'nature' and how that influences our management of endangered species.

I get very excited about designing new courses and thinking about ways to engage students. I completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Stanford University. At Stanford I helped design and teach a course in global sustainability that incorporated some fun projects, including podcasts the students put together to explain different elements of the ongoing California drought. One

group of students interviewed redwood forest researchers, who explained that rising temperatures are compounding the drought for redwoods by reducing the amount of coastal fog that the trees traditionally have received water from. In the long-term, some redwood forest advocates are hoping to assist the trees to migrate north, while others suggest irrigating particularly special groves. Each of these options comes with potential social and ecological tradeoffs.

Another group investigated the drought's impacts on Chinook Salmon, which need an abundance of cold water to migrate up California streams to spawn. They documented the competition between farming and fishing interests in debating where to allocate water—farmers argue they need it to grow food for

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the nation, and commercial and recreational salmon fishers want the same water to be allowed to continue downstream to protect salmon populations.

How did you get to where you are?

I've always enjoyed teaching and tutoring others, and growing up I thought that I might want to be a professor someday. However, it's been a pretty winding road to get where I am now. I originally came into UCSB as a History major, because that was my favorite subject in high school. Then I took an intro to Environmental Studies course, in my freshman year, and I loved it. For a couple years, I couldn't decide which subject I wanted to major in. I ultimately chose Environmental Studies for two main reasons. One was that I simply got more involved with the people in the Environmental Studies program and with their internship program—there was a more active outside-of-class compo-

nent that I enjoyed. The program was a really friendly place to be and they really supported their undergraduates. The second reason was that I suspected I might want to be an academic, but wanted to leave my options open and there are so many diverse careers where an environmental background would be useful like wildlife management, city and regional planning, state and national Park Ranger programs, public policymaking, or working for NGOs and international conservation or social justice associations. I finally ended up focusing on Environmental Studies and got a minor in History.

After graduation, I felt like I had been in school for so long that I really wanted some real-world experience. So I got a job down in Los Angeles working for an environmental consulting firm, writing environmental analyses of different building projects in LA. What I liked best about this job was the chance to visit the sites of building

and redevelopment projects and analyzing the potential impacts on the surrounding lands or neighborhoods. I got to measure noise, think about how building shadows would affect neighbors, survey trees, and do research about the air and water quality impacts the project would likely have. I also got to think about mitigation measures that would help reduce the environmental impacts of the project.

Overall, it was a good job, but I missed the freedom to think about the issues, projects, and questions that most interested me. I also found it difficult to sit at a desk most days from 8:30 to 5. I missed the combination of classroom time and writing and research time that the academic world has. So after two years I went back to school to get my PhD in environmental studies at Duke University in North Carolina, where I did a dissertation with recreational and commercial fishermen on fishing conflicts and uses of ocean space. Since graduat-

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ing in 2012 from that program, I’ve completed two postdocs while looking for a faculty job. There have been many moments along this journey when I felt unsure of what I really wanted for my future, or unsure of the right choice. But I’ve just continued to follow what has felt like the best decision for any particular moment. And now I’m so thrilled because it feels like I’ve found my dream job. But it has taken 10 years since graduating UCSB to find it!

What was the best thing you did as an undergrad to help you get to where you are?

There are a couple things that I feel were very important during my undergraduate experience. I was able to find smaller places, the environmental studies program and the Environmental Affairs Board (a student organization), within the big campus of UCSB that felt like home to me. I got to know many of my fellow students in the same program as well as the professors. The sense of community that I found there really helped me to stay motivated in the program. I was also able to do an internship off-campus, doing restoration work at a butterfly preserve. I found my internship on the

ES listserv. Eric Zimmerman, the department’s academic advisor, has always done a great job with the list and he also helped me figure out how to apply for the internship. It was a great experience because I got to learn about all kinds of native California plants, something I couldn’t get from a class. Finally, the environmental studies program offered the chance to write a senior thesis and receive a grant through URCA—Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities. Though it took a lot of time and effort, doing a thesis gave me confidence as a researcher and I believe it helped me to obtain my first job. It showed that I could complete a real project.

What do you wish you had known while you were in undergrad?

I wish I had worked a little harder as an undergrad to really get to know my professors. I got to know one or two, and that was really helpful when it came time to ask for letters of recommendation, but I feel like I could have gotten more out of my undergraduate experience by taking advantage of the amazing professors at UCSB. I also wish that I had studied abroad. It’s something you will never be able to

do in the same way you can as an undergrad. I thought that I was too busy and that I wanted to finish on time, but now I see that finishing perfectly on time is not really as important as gaining those incredible experiences that you can have studying abroad.

What was the best thing about being a Gaucho?

For me, the best thing about being a gaucho was the diversity of



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wonderful people I got to know at UCSB. As I mentioned, the environmental studies community was really special to me. My fellow majors were always so hopeful and energetic about making a difference in the world. I really enjoyed the sense of purpose that we shared. I also got to know some lifelong friends from my freshman year dorm and at the housing cooperatives that I later lived in. I really treasure the time I got to spend in the company of unique and creative people.

Any final words of wisdom for the current Gaucho generation?

In terms of obtaining an environmental consulting job, I think three things are very important. The environmental studies major was definitely helpful because it showed that

I had diverse coursework focusing on both environmental policy and ecology. Within the major, the class that was most helpful with the environmental planning course. It was very practical and I learned many of the things that I needed to know for a consulting job about California environmental law. Doing the senior thesis project was also very helpful, because it showed the person who hired me that I could write well and I could organize research for a large project.

In general, the college experience offers so many more options than probably anything you've experienced before in your life. I would encourage you to pursue any interest that you think you might have, no matter how small that little voice in your head is. You just never know where it might lead!



Noëlle welcomes UCSB students to contact her via email with questions about her research and advice on how to prepare for a career in the environmental studies field. Requests to review resumes or inquiries about open positions will not be responded to.

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