

Students are interested in the amount of time you spend in the field, lab, office and traveling. What does your work involve?
(2018/2019 GeoCareers Panel Luncheon)

Brandy Barnes (Draper Aden Associates): As many professionals will tell you, this varies by industry, experience, role of the employee, and company projects. Expect to travel and be out in the field for your first two to five years. When interviewing for a position or after a job offer, make sure you ask plenty of questions about the amount of field work, traveling, and office work. You may also choose to inquire about current projects and the locations of the projects, if not available online. This will help you get a better understanding of a company's expectations. Over the last 4 years, I have experienced approximately 50% of my time in the field/lab and 50% in the office. Some projects have kept me in the field for months, other times I will be in the office for a few weeks, it just depends on the needs of the company. I have also experienced some projects requiring travel and overnight stays. In the spring, I was out of town eight weeks between April and June; other than that time frame, travel tends to be between two days and two weeks periodically throughout the year.

Terry Briggs (Newmont Goldcorp): This is highly variable and can depend upon the role, where the industry is in the commodity cycle, the size of the company, the stage of a project (discovery-development-operation). As a graduate, it is not unlikely to only be able to go to one workshop or conference a year (as a tip – a speaking place is the best way to get to a conference), travel in early years is often limited to the project site. Field work can be anything from a big aspect of the work, such as our greenfield geologists, to minimal such as our database geoscientists. As you progress through your career you may get the opportunity to be exposed to more travel to other projects, operations, conferences and events. Technology has enabled more to be done remotely, and an increased expectation of analysis and interpretation in the office. I have had the opportunity to work through all aspects of the project cycle from discovery to closure, and one of the benefits of the geosciences, is that it is global, it offers career development opportunities that can have you in the field or the office as your wants and needs require.

J.P. Dube (Chesapeake Energy): Unfortunately, the answer is it depends on your company and your role. Some basins and assignments present great opportunities to visit field outcrops, some don't. Some roles include active operations including drilling, coring and seismic acquisition, some don't. Some companies have amazing labs like Chesapeake, most don't. Some companies offer great training, some don't. Some companies work all over the world, some don't. The reality is that most oil and gas geoscientists spend most of their time in the office at a workstation but the best jobs out there provide ample opportunities to get away from the desk to be hands on.

Alicia Kahn (Chevron Energy Corporation): Now in the downturn, travel has been severely curtailed. Whereas I used to travel globally, even a trip to a lab is rare now. Field trip frequency is much reduced as well. I spend most of my time on the computer or microscope. I anticipate that the travel will never return to what it once was, especially because many offices worldwide have been closed or reduced in size. That being said, once the economy improves for the oil and gas industry there will likely be more flexibility in meeting locations and field work/school possibilities.

Greg Liggett (Bureau of Land Management): I have great flexibility with time in the field, office, and travel, within certain limits of course. Most of my time is office-based. I myself do not do much field work, but can go to the field as needed to work with paleontologists who have permits to work on public land. As for travel, I usually can do several professional meetings a year, and several instances of work-related travel such as meetings. However, federal budgets can change year to year, and when congress doesn't pass a budget until well into a new fiscal year, we often don't know how much money we have, which is very wasteful.

Bruce Schumacher (US Forest Service): The job is what you make it. I firmly believe many employees have the latitude to make these decisions for themselves, certainly to a lesser degree, in some cases to a greater degree. I strive for a nice balance – at lower levels one is likely to be more field based (~perhaps 50% of time). Higher levels in an organization, field time is likely to be considerably less – but again, the job is what you make it.

Limaris (Lima) Soto (National Park Service): In the past, I used to spend more time in the field. In my current position, I spend the majority of my time in the office. I am able to visit interns or do training a few times a year especially during the summer when we have interns completing their work. The majority of my time in the office is spent in calls or meetings and answering messages from parks or doing financial work for the programs.

Lisa White (UC Museum of Paleontology): My grant-supported projects at the museum require field work, on land and on ships, and spending 4-6 weeks/year in the field is not unusual for me. I frequently present my work at national and international conferences and in a typical year I attend 3-4 conferences. In my role as the director of education and outreach at the UC Museum of Paleontology, I create learning materials and modules for education and public audiences and work with undergraduate and graduate students interested in improving their science communication and outreach skills. Many of my days in the office are spent managing the administrative work of the museum's grants and supervising the education and outreach team (consisting of a science writer, web manager, and graphic artist). I also partner with other museums and academic units across the Berkeley campus in support of STEM education and diversity in STEM.

Bret Dixon (Anadarko Petroleum): Depends on assignment. Some individuals in some companies may spend a lot of time in the field, on a plane, in the lab, or at the work station. Throughout my career I have done all of them. I started my career in a more operational role where I spent a lot of time on rigs and in the oilfield as well as in the office. There have been parts of my career where I was primarily conducting field and lab based geologic research and teaching. I have spent years interpreting wells logs and seismic data sets in support of both domestic and international exploration and development drilling efforts. A large part of my career has been spent in international new ventures and business development, where I often travelled the world looking for new places for my company to explore. My current role is as an advisor focused on the mentoring and training of early career geoscientists. I am also heavily involved in recruiting, and serve in a senior technical expert and advisory role across the corporation.

Leslie Hsu (U.S. Geological Survey): These days I spend most of my time in the office, and travel about a week every month or two. Teleworking is fairly common, because most computer work can be done in any location, but I prefer to stay in the office. As a coordinator, it is my duty to get the appropriate information to the right people

at the right time. This translates to a lot of communication, whether in the form of emails, social media, blog posts, and presentations. It also entails participating in the activities of other organizations and bringing relevant information back. With the rise of web-conferencing software, days can be full of online meetings. I always feel really happy when someone indicates that they found out about the right opportunity or publication because of our communication activities.

Jason Kenworthy (National Park Service): NPS geoscience positions vary from nearly all field work to nearly all office work. In addition to the 418 parks across the country, there are 7 regional offices, and many national programs that support parks across the country—most of the national natural resource offices are in Denver or Fort Collins, Colorado. People that work in the regional or national offices provide technical support to parks and may travel to them to provide direct support or be in more of a management, advisory, or liaison role with minimal travel. I am a program lead and work in the national office near Denver so I typically travel once a year and that's to GSA. However, the technical specialists in our office can travel to parks much more often and during field season may be gone half or more of the time. If you are stationed at a park, many of your duties will involve field work. All job and internship announcements list travel and field requirements for the position so you can make sure the position fits your expectations for field, office, and travel time.

Ken Ridgway (Purdue University): Most field-based research careers requires about six weeks of a year of intensive field work. Much of the remaining part of the year is dedicated to preparing and analyzing samples collected in the field and writing up the results.

Todd Thompson (Indiana Geological and Water Survey): Before obtaining my current position, I could spend a third to half of the year in the field. A typical survey employee spends about a third of their time in the field, a third, and the lab, and a third authoring publications and answering service requests. Of course, this changes depending on the project need and how much managing is being done.

