

KATHRYN MENGERINK | Environmental Law Institute, mengerink@eli.org

Degree: When, where, what, and what in?

Initially, I was 100% science-focused, earning a BS degree in zoology from Texas A&M University (1996) and a PhD in marine biology from Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California, San Diego (2002). I then steered off course and landed in law school at Boalt Hall, School of Law, University of California, Berkeley. I earned a JD in 2005, with a certificate of specialization in environmental law.

Did you stay in academia at all, and if so, for how long?

I abandoned academia when I graduated from Scripps. However, through an interesting turn of events, I find myself back at my oceanography alma mater where I now spend part of my time teaching ocean law and policy to future oceanographers and to other graduate students.

How did you go about searching for a job outside of the university setting?

Law school was my approach to an alternative career.

What is your current job? What path did you take to get there?

I have the perfect job...or jobs, and I still find myself marveling at how I managed to achieve it. My primary job is as an attorney and as the director of the Ocean Program at the Environmental Law Institute—an environmental law and policy research and education organization based in

Washington, DC. I also work with the Scripps Institution of Oceanography Center for Marine Biodiversity and Conservation where I teach ocean law and policy and coordinate a summer graduate course in marine biodiversity, conservation, and global change.

Knowing in graduate school that lab work was no longer my passion, I began to mull over two things: (1) making money and (2) making a difference. I decided that my best bet to achieve one or both of these things was to get a law degree where I could explore my passion—conservation—and, alternatively, develop the skills I needed to make the big bucks. In the end, I walked away from a six-figure job offer and took a coveted position as a law fellow at the Environmental Law Institute (ELI). During my year as a fellow there, I worked with institute staff to develop ELI's first Ocean Program. I stayed on after my fellowship to direct the program.

My next move was both personally and professionally motivated. While I loved Washington, DC, I missed the ocean, the science, and my partner—all of which were waiting for me at Scripps. When I graduated from Scripps in 2002, the Center for Marine Biodiversity was just getting started. When I returned in 2006, it was thriving, but also in need of a law and policy expert. Today, I continue to use my dual advanced degrees to bring together ocean law and policy and the science that supports it.



What did your oceanographic education (or academic career) give you that is useful in your current job?

My science PhD has been an enormous asset at every step of the way. Simply having it helps open doors. More importantly, the skills I developed as a graduate student are essential ones that I still depend upon, especially the independent analysis and problem-solving skills. My substantive scientific knowledge is the foundation upon which I work as an attorney. Science-based management is central to my current research, and having a scientific background helps enormously in understanding the challenges and potential solutions to ocean and coastal conservation and management.

Is the job satisfying? What aspects of the job do you like best/least?

I love my career. The best part about it is that I get paid to do something that is fun and exciting and has the possibility of influencing how conservation decisions are made.

Do you have any recommendations for new grads looking for jobs?

When I was torn between doing something I liked and making a lot of money, or doing something I loved and making

quite a bit less, I asked my law school advisor what he thought I should do. He gave me a somewhat exasperated look and asked, “What do you **want** to do?” With that, my choice was clear. I wanted to spend my life doing what I could to help preserve and protect the ocean. My suggestion to new grads students is to answer that question and go for it. ☺