

Kuch 3/13/01

WHAT'S AN ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMIST SUPPOSED TO DO WITH HIS/HER LIFE?

What's my training and Job History?

What are the options?

- 1) Academia: main line research institution vrs. predominantly teaching institution. (Talk to Prof. Zilberman about this option)
- 2) Consulting firms: (Talk to Prof. Rausser)
- 3) Non Governmental Environmental Organization (my perception is for the most part they don't have much use for economics and don't pay a living wage, WRI seems to be an exception in terms of employing economists)
- 4) Government:
 - States pay poorly and have little use for PhDs.
 - Legis. Branch of Federal Government – not a career except for Cong Res. Service & cong. Budget Office.
 - Executive Branch: USEPA, USDA (ERS, NRCS, USFS), DOI, Corps of E. all hire resource/environmental economists).

Let's Talk about jobs in the Executive Branch (mostly USEPA)

Types of jobs for resource/environmental economists:

- 1) Research – publishable outputs (ERS, OEE (EPA))
- 2) Programmatic Support – analysis and tools (e.g. cost-benefit analysis, trading simulation models) to support regulation development and program implementation. (ERS, NRCS, USFS, COE, DOI's Policy Office, OEE (USEPA), EPA's Program Offices).
- 3) Policy/Program Analysis – evaluate the performance of programs, identify problems not being adequately addressed, develop innovative approaches (e.g. trading, indemnification) and strategies. (OCE (USDA), NRSS (EPA), also CRS and parts of CBO (Cong.).

JOB ATTRIBUTES

“Research” Jobs:

- academic-type research (often political as well peer review),
- well-structured low-stress,
- controversial topics or conclusions frowned on,
- need to develop expertise in a narrow area (it is important to pick one with a future),
- little interaction “up or down”
- little interaction with researchers in other disciplines,
- little upward mobility,
- rewards are in the work and the length of you resume,

-Ph.D. is necessary.

Programmatic Support Jobs:

- doing a fairly well specified job for a client,
- terms of reference for the tasks are often specified in detail (e.g. guidance for regulatory impact analysis),
- often involves a lot of contracting and contract management,
- “successfully” managing complex tasks will result in promotion out of doing analysis into being a “manager of resources”,
- frequently reporting to or dealing with people trained in other disciplines (e.g. lawyers, biochemists) who view economists as “glorified accountants”, who must be tolerated as a necessary evil,
- work could be repetitious,
- Ph.D. rarely necessary for job, colleagues will often not have an advanced economics degree, i.e. (in EPA).
- writing skill necessary, but not oral skills.

Policy/Program Analysis Jobs:

- operate as an “information broker” (need to understand current literature, but rarely need to do state-of the-art analysis yourself),
- a lot of interaction “up & down” (sometimes way up),
- need to be conversant with other relevant disciplines,
- generally operate long a long leash with little supervision,
- a lot of quick turn around projects, (lots of long hours, frequent travel),
- you get to work on a variety of topics,
- need a lot of practical field and institutional knowledge,
- need excellent oral as well as written communication skills,
- need the courage of your convictions,
- you will have lots of enemies and lots of friends,
- if you are respected you will have job mobility,
- Ph.D. not really necessary (but makes life easier),
- Publishing helps your reputation, you will be invited to write policy related papers and give speeches.
- you live by your wits, it can get stressful.

Answer some questions about yourself:

- 1) What is more important, winning professional recognition or affecting real change?
- 2) Am I willing to grapple with messy real-life problems, or do I prefer elegant abstractions?
- 3) I like dealing with people in other disciplines and backgrounds. I strongly prefer to deal with people who think like I do and speak the same (professional language).
- 4) Do you prefer to avoid conflict, or are you willing to “rock the boat”?

- 5) Are you an extrovert, who enjoys selling your ideas, or do you prefer to have someone seek you out for advice?
- 6) It's really important to make a lot of money vrs. earning just enough to live on comfortably.
- 6) Do I really need to go through the agony of getting a PhD?