



STS Careers Podcast – Chantal Chevallier talks to Science Policy advisor, and former BSc HPS student, Marie-Claire Hawthorne.

Marie-Claire graduated from the department in 2008, and at the time of recording, was a Science Policy intern at the Royal Society. She then went on to work at the Science Museum before changing career to work as a Year 6 teacher. This interview was recorded in 2011.

CC Welcome listeners. We have a great podcast planned for you today, as we're joined by our lovely alumna, Marie-Claire. She'll be talking to us today about her experiences in the job market since graduating from UCL. I'm Chantal Chevallier, a third year undergrad with STS, and it's a pleasure to have you here Marie-Claire.

MH Thank you.

CC So just to provide us with a background, what did you study while at UCL?

MH I studied History and Philosophy of Science and my main areas of focus were my dissertation on history and philosophy of physics. My research project for the electricity project for Hasok Chang, which was on electroconvulsive therapy, and these were big areas of interest and I'm quite proud of them.

CC So your work at The Royal Society, could you tell us a little more about that, please?

MH Sure. Well, as you know, The Royal Society is the most prestigious scientific institution in the UK, sorry for any others but it is, and one of the most prestigious institutions in the world. And to have the chance to be an intern at The RS even if it's for three months only, it's just a privilege really. Everybody there is so welcoming and more than keen to help you understand all the workings and the interactions.

CC So after your internship, what did you then do with The RS? Did you stay there or did you move on to something else?

MH My internship has been extended to the end of March because the Atlas project that we're working on is a very unusual project, and it's had periods of heavy work and periods where it slows down. At the moment we're at the peer review stage, so everything is slowing down a little bit whilst we're waiting for all the peer reviews to get back, so we can send them to the authors so they can integrate them into the reports.

CC What do you think has...apart from obviously the STS department and the nature of the degrees that they offer, offer an invaluable experience in a role like an internship role that you have at the moment - Apart from that, what do you think has been the best piece of advice or skill that you have been able to take from STS and apply it to your current role?

MH I think academic writing. I was really rubbish at writing essays when I first started and I have really good writing skills now, really good research skills, and I think this is a really good skill to have when you go into any jobs. So organisation of time, that was essential, obviously it's essential when you're doing a degree to know how to organise your time.

CC Is there any advice that you would give to the current students along the lines of organising their time, the writing skills and things like that that you've been able to apply in the working world? Is there something that maybe is new that you have experienced with The Royal Society which relates to those skills that you already had, but when you're in the real working environment that becomes perhaps maybe more obvious?

MH Yes, I understand. Well, it's actually a good question because the report that I'm working on in my internship is The Atlas of Islamic World Science and Innovation. When you learn science policy at UCL and when you actually live it in practice, it's quite different and this is a huge collaboration project between prestigious international organisations. Diplomacy is the key element. You can only learn to be more diplomatic, or subtle, in an office environment, I guess.

So equipping yourself with experience of working amongst different environments, either in a lawyer's office or in a bank or in a school even, anything. Anything that can teach you various stratas of life so that you understand the subtleties of dealing with different types of people, I think that's quite crucial and I've realised this through inviting peer reviews.

Obviously if you're going to ask a Nobel prize [winner] to review your report, or some high profile scientists, or members of a private industry, or members of governments, you obviously have to put your best word forward. I would definitely advise, in terms of time management, that whilst you study, you have to have a part-time job because it really forces you to divide your time more wisely.

CC And did you find that your experience at UCL helped you a great deal?

MH Absolutely. Well, definitely in the work, in the science policy centre because for report writing, you obviously need strong experience in academic writing, research, fact-based evidence, referencing and this has been drilled into us quite well at UCL.

CC Well, that's about all we have time for today. So big thank you to Marie-Claire from The Royal Society. If you want to find out more about careers advice, then take a look at the career section on the STS website, which you can access at www.ucl.ac.uk/sts. I'm Chantal Chevallier, thank you for listening and goodbye.