

# TIPS FROM ALUMNI IN ENVIRONMENTAL CAREERS

Alumni working in Environmental Careers offered the following insight and advice.



## **KURT GOUGH '88: Founding Partner, Shelter | Architecture + Interior Design**

1. *Briefly describe your current position and the organization you work for. If possible, provide the URL.*  
[www.shelterarchitecture.com](http://www.shelterarchitecture.com)  
<http://www.linkedin.com/in/kurtgough>  
Please check out this video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mg-TF8UGlbi>
2. *How did you break into this career? What was your path after St. Olaf?*  
St Olaf Majors in Theater design & Studio Art  
Worked professionally in theater for 8 years, returned to school for Master Degree in Architecture, worked at 2 architecture firms prior to starting Shelter Architecture
3. *Did you have internships prior to obtaining a full-time position in this career field? If so, what did you do, and how did the internship(s) help you?*  
I had drafting skills so was able to get a job in a firm right as I entered school
4. *What are advantages and disadvantages of working in this career?*  
The profession / career can be almost anything you want to make of it.  
Poor market conditions currently.
5. *What is the outlook for this field in the future? Is it a growing career field?*  
Currently the field is shrinking but I anticipate slow growth in a year or so.
6. *Is additional education required to be successful, beyond a B.S. or B.A. degree?*  
You must have a degree from an accredited architecture program. If you already have an undergraduate degree then a masters degree is the best (shortest) way to go.
7. *What would you recommend that students do to "test" this career field? Do you know of any specific internship opportunities?*  
It is tough to get internships without a degree in the field. CAD skills are one way in to see what the career is like.
8. *What advice would you offer a student interested in breaking into this career? What kind of experience would be advantageous for students to obtain now as undergrads?*  
Get broad life experiences, be passionate about designing the environment that we live in, get a master's degree
9. *Would you be willing to have current students contact you about setting up:*  
 an informational interview  
 a job shadow  
 networking/additional contacts you may be willing to share

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## **BRITT CARLSON '04: Living Green 365 Coordinator, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)**

- Briefly describe your current position and the organization you work for. If possible, provide the URL.*

I am the Living Green 365 Coordinator at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). I do education and outreach to Minnesota residents about actions they can take to reduce their impact on the environment. Two major components of our program are the Living Green Expo (first weekend in May at the Minnesota State Fair Grandstand) and the Eco Experience at the Minnesota State Fair. You can learn about these events and sign up for a monthly livinggreen365 e-mail newsletter at [www.livinggreen.org](http://www.livinggreen.org).
- How did you break into this career? What was your path after St. Olaf?*

After St. Olaf, I participated in a graduate naturalist training at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center. I fell in love with teaching and decided to pursue my Masters in Environmental Education from the University of Minnesota-Duluth. During my time at UMD, I volunteered a lot with a non-profit call the Minnesota Association for Environmental Education. The work I did as a volunteer, and the network I established, helped me land my current position.
- Did you have internships prior to obtaining a full-time position in this career field? If so, what did you do, and how did the internship(s) help you?*

I had a lot of temporary/seasonal work in biology, research, and environmental education during and after college. The variety of experiences was important for exposing me to career options. My volunteer work and short-term positions also gave me a chance to develop skills such as event-planning, leadership, etc.
- What are advantages and disadvantages of working in this career?*

The field of environmental education (EE) is broad and includes classroom teachers, nonformal educators, administrators, and funders. The EE community is a group of passionate people who are not working for a large paycheck. Instead, they get the benefits of working outside (in many cases), working toward a mission they believe in, and continually challenging themselves. In my work at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, I am a program coordinator, so I spend a lot of time at my desk and on the phone. I never imagined myself in a cubicle, but there is good work to be done there too!
- What is the outlook for this field in the future? Is it a growing career field?*

Interest in environmental education is increasing, though funding for programs is tough right now. EE comes in so many shapes and forms (early childhood education, K-12, college, adult....) that there will always be work to be done and those that are passionate about sharing their love for the outdoors/nature/living green will find a way to do it.
- Is additional education required to be successful, beyond a B.S. or B.A. degree?*

An internship, education program, graduate degree, or immersion experience is always a helpful learning experience. In my role at the MPCA, a graduate degree is needed to learn about project management, program development and evaluation, and budget management. Not all EE careers need additional degrees.
- What would you recommend that students do to "test" this career field? Do you know of any specific internship opportunities?*

Work at Wolf Ridge ELC or Eagle Bluff ELC for a year. Look for internships at Wood Lake Nature Center, Dodge Nature Center, or Warner Nature Center. Look out west at the Teton Science School, or lead trips for a YMCA camp or for the Student Conservation Association. Check out lots of opportunities at [www.seek.state.mn.us](http://www.seek.state.mn.us).
- What advice would you offer a student interested in breaking into this career? What kind of experience would be advantageous for students to obtain now as undergrads?*

To get a taste of environmental education as a field, join the National Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE: <http://naaee.org>) or the Minnesota Association for Environmental Education (MAEE: <http://naaee.org/maee>).

While at Olaf, learn as much environmental knowledge as you can – science, policy, history, etc. You'll be able to draw on that knowledge for years, as you learn other skills (teaching, non-profit management, etc.) through your post-college experiences.
- Would you be willing to have current students contact you about setting up:*

  - an informational interview
  - a job shadow
  - networking/additional contacts you may be willing to share

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## **KARI LANDENBERGER '05: Environmental Specialist and Project Manager, Trans Environmental**

1. *Briefly describe your current position and the organization you work for. If possible, provide the URL.*

I worked as an Environmental Specialist and Project Manager for Trans Environmental in Loves Park, IL. Trans Environmental performs environmental cleanups and deals with Hazmat situations. This means that they research sites to see if they have been contaminated and also perform the clean up operations needed. In addition, they have an emergency Hazmat service that helps to contain and clean up a spill of hazardous material. Here is their company link:  
<http://www.transenvironmental.com>

2. *How did you break into this career? What was your path after St. Olaf?*

I started as a Project Manager with Trans Environmental right out of college. My uncle knew the owner and I sent in my resume and he brought me in for an interview. He trained me in performing phase one environmental site assessments.

3. *Did you have internships prior to obtaining a full-time position in this career field? If so, what did you do, and how did the internship(s) help you?*

I had no previous experience with this specific job field, but my supervisor knew I had a background in environmental studies. He gave me the chance to get some experience in the field, and learn new skills.

4. *What are advantages and disadvantages of working in this career?*

The advantages that this field offers are the variety of tasks. You aren't sitting behind a desk all day. You get out in the field and take soil samples, perform site walkthroughs, help in soil boring and underground storage tank removal. Some days are spent in the office typing up reports and some days are spent visiting libraries and local government agencies collecting research information on your specific properties. I also went to new subdivisions that were being built and assessed their runoff and soil erosion prevention measures to make sure they were complying with the set government standards.

The disadvantages include those that come with working outside. You can get very dirty, you are working outside in adverse conditions sometimes, and working around very loud machinery. Also you are sometimes in very close proximity to hazardous substances, some of which require you to get certification to be able to work with them. Some people might not consider these disadvantages, but I can't really think of any other parts of this field that would be disadvantages.

5. *What is the outlook for this field in the future? Is it a growing career field?*

This is definitely a growing career field. More and more people are realizing the necessity of getting environmental assessments done on properties they are thinking of purchasing. With environmental regulations becoming more strict more cleanup work is going to be needed. Plus there are lots of properties out there that need to be cleaned up.

6. *Is additional education required to be successful, beyond a B.S. or B.A. degree?*

Additional education is not necessarily required, but to progress in the field certain education and certification would be recommended. For example getting your Hazmat certification would open up even more opportunities in this field. In addition, getting your masters in Environmental Health and Safety would open up even more opportunities. Right away though, you don't need anything more than a BA.

7. *What would you recommend that students do to "test" this career field? Do you know of any specific internship opportunities?*

I would recommend calling companies similar to Trans Environmental and seeing if they have any internship opportunities or seeing if they could shadow an employee for a day. This is a very hands-on field that experiencing it directly is the best way to learn about it.

8. *What advice would you offer a student interested in breaking into this career? What kind of experience would be advantageous for students to obtain now as undergrads?*

If they can take some hazmat classes and gain some of those certifications now, then that would open up opportunities for them right away. Also take classes in environmental policy and regulation. This field deals a lot with acronyms and having a working knowledge of those will also help make you more marketable.

9. *Would you be willing to have current students contact you about setting up:*

  X   an informational interview

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## **SEIJA RAHKOLA '08: Associate Environmental Consultant, Natural Resource Group**

- Briefly describe your current position and the organization you work for. If possible, provide the URL.*  
I work as an associate environmental consultant at a private firm in the twin cities, Natural Resource Group. <http://www.nrg-llc.com/>
- How did you break into this career? What was your path after St. Olaf?*  
Majoring in Economics and Environmental Studies, I was interested in pursuing a career dealing with environmental issues and business. I used the CEL to search for environmental firms and careers in the cities, and stumbled across Natural Resource Group at the MN Private Colleges career fair. After a series of interviews, I was hired as an associate consultant in the regulatory department.
- Did you have internships prior to obtaining a full-time position in this career field? If so, what did you do, and how did the internship(s) help you?*  
I had the opportunity to work in a one-month internship doing health-sector research for a venture capital company. This internship was a great experience working in a business-professional atmosphere, and helped me hone a high-level of research and presentation skills. My current employers were impressed with this and other previous job experiences, and felt the skills acquired from these were easily transferable to my current everyday tasks with data research, interpretation, and presentation.
- What are advantages and disadvantages of working in this career?*  
One of the main advantages from working as an associate environmental consultant is the exposure to a variety of issues, both legal and environmental, as well as direct interactions with business clients, agencies, construction services, engineers, and consultants with a variety of advanced degrees. These interactions present the varied issues and concerns held by each group, and present an everyday challenge to find a solution that works for everyone.  
  
A disadvantage is that working for a private firm leaves you subject to the demands of the client. You are allowed to advise and recommend, but in the end, it is the client's final decision on how to propose or present a project to the agencies, and you have to deal with any repercussions that might have. This can also lead to many hours of overtime with deadlines flaring up quickly and having to deal with unexpected problems that occur sporadically throughout the project.
- What is the outlook for this field in the future? Is it a growing career field?*  
The outlook is positive, as the need for consultants is always there, especially with the large and growing focus on environmental issues. Companies are beginning to rely on the advice and recommendations of good environmental consultants to keep publicity positive and ensure they are mitigating their impacts to the environment. However, jobs in the consulting field may currently be scarce as fewer companies are undertaking new infrastructure expansions in the near future due to the uncertain economic situation in the country.
- Is additional education required to be successful, beyond a B.S. or B.A. degree?*  
It can be beneficial, but isn't required. Years of work experience and/or various training certifications are also valuable references in the field.
- What would you recommend that students do to "test" this career field? Do you know of any specific internship opportunities?*  
No, but any internship experience with research and communication will be very valuable to any future consulting employer.
- What advice would you offer a student interested in breaking into this career? What kind of experience would be advantageous for students to obtain now as undergrads?*  
Research the varying types of consulting opportunities – some work more closely with clients while others work more closely with agencies. Also, there are types of consultants that work more directly as environmental inspectors – they get out into the field more and work with construction workers to monitor environmental impacts. Certifications, like water quality inspection, can be obtained through outside training courses, and these could be good boosters to your resume.
- Would you be willing to have current students contact you about setting up:*  
\_x\_ networking/additional contacts you may be willing to share .. I could provide names of various environmental consulting firms in Minnesota – but I have no idea about job openings.