Preparing for, adjusting to, and making the most of your STEM career
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About AWIS

Founded in 1971, the Association for Women in Science (AWIS) is the largest multidisciplinary organization for women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). We are dedicated to driving excellence in STEM by achieving equity and full participation of women in all disciplines and across all employment sectors. AWIS reaches more than 20,000 professionals in STEM with members, chapters, and affiliates worldwide. Membership is open to any individual who supports the vision and mission of AWIS.

Our Mission

AWIS champions the interests of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics across all disciplines and employment sectors. Working for positive system transformation, AWIS strives to ensure that all women in these fields can achieve their full potential.

AWIS at Amherst

The goal of the AWIS Amherst chapter is to act as an umbrella organization for student-led, women-in-STEM initiatives at the college and to help coordinate events across the campus and the Five College Consortium. We aim to provide support for all students, staff, and faculty interested in promoting equality for women in STEM, regardless of gender or major. We provide Amherst AWIS members with an email newsletter, website, event calendar, and organizational support. Our ties to a national organization allow for scholarship and networking opportunities for our students, creating both a local and national network.

What is the Career Toolkit?

The Career Toolkit is a guide for recent graduates pursuing careers in STEM and prospective STEM professionals. It features the experiences and advice of Amherst alumni (both men and women) from a variety of fields and backgrounds, organized by theme. It was inspired by our Internship Toolkit, which received recognition from the national AWIS chapter last year. We hope you find this handbook helpful and informative!
The Application of Liberal Arts in STEM

Amherst was where I learned to love learning. When I was a student at Amherst, I wish I had the same perspective on learning that I have now. It would have been even more fun. This is my opinion, but in the real world, I see connections everywhere that are critical for new paradigms to be successful, that most people think are not related to one another at all...What I learned at Amherst in Anthropology, Religion, English Lit, and Psychology has as much impact on my chances for success as what I learned in Biochemistry. People who want to do an ROI (return on investment) analysis on a liberal arts education ignore the value of simply being an educated person. I have never felt that being an educated person with diverse interests could ever be considered a disadvantage, or a waste of time. I think the real world reminds me of this almost daily.

-- Class of ‘79, Biotechnology

The liberal arts education puts emphasis on being a critical reader and analyzer and that's helped me with reading and critiquing scientific papers.

-- Class of ‘15, Research/Healthcare

My job is to create sense and good decisions at the intersections of fields that I'm not trained in. What better preparation for that than a liberal arts education? [It's] about finding a way to be comfortable not being the expert about everything, asking good questions, synthesis, analogic thinking. Also thinking about things in the context of the people and behaviors, since in the real world facts and expertise tend to come in the form of human beings vs. books, and you need to understand, work with, and motivate them. And understand your own impact on them. Liberal arts focus on debate and discussion and exchange of ideas is good basic training for this aspect.

-- Class of ‘94, Biotechnology

Writing, writing, writing. It's incredible how many people have not had much training in writing, scientific or otherwise. It's an invaluable asset that helped me earn the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship. There are other intangibles, of course, but I'd say that writing was the biggest.

-- Class of ‘12, Academia/Biochemistry PhD
When I first began graduate school, I was concerned that I would be underprepared because many of my peers had taken a greater number of science courses and with more specialized focus in their undergraduate education. However, those fears turned out to be unfounded. Even though much of the content was new to me, my liberal arts education prepared me well for tackling new subjects and provided me with the quantitative reasoning, synthesis, and technical writing skills I needed to succeed. I felt especially well prepared to find the big picture motivation behind new research areas, and to communicate that information clearly to both scientific and non-scientific audiences, which gave me an advantage to lean on even while I had to learn new information and content that my peers were already familiar with. I also have benefitted from the courses I took in the social sciences and humanities, which have helped me better understand and communicate the social and policy relevance of my research.

-- Class of ‘07, Academic Research

I think it has helped me the most in terms of communicating with other people. Building a decent understanding of what people would like to accomplish and then anticipating obstacles or checking assumptions come fairly naturally. A lot of it is intuiting the arguments they want to make but may or may not successfully express and crafting persuasive arguments that I can use in response.

-- Class of ‘12, Biotechnology

I think it has made me a much more robust and critical thinker. It's definitely spurred me to think more about the how and why in medicine and health policy, rather than just committing facts to memory. I would actually say that my liberal arts background has spoiled me in [the] sense that it becomes very difficult to go back to rote memorization and multiple choice tests after the rigor and thoughtfulness of Amherst.

-- Class of ‘13, Medicine

Excellent communication skills:

➔ Hone your writing ability, which is valuable in STEM
➔ Allow you to connect with and relate to people of different backgrounds
➔ Enable you to learn at a deeper level and analyze the big picture
Handling Stress

The reality is that any job that challenges you to be continually learning and getting better all the time—and most of the best jobs do that—is going to come with some stress. Stress isn't necessarily a bad thing...some is good. The key is how you manage it. You need perspective to manage stress, and other things that you like to do in your ‘spare time’ so that you don't become one-dimensional. But this is what we learn at Amherst.

-- Class of ‘79, Biotechnology

For me exercise is a critical safety valve and way to regain perspective in the midst of job stress. I've also learned to play some mental tricks like planning an enjoyable three-day weekend a few weeks out so I have something to look forward to.

-- Class of ‘71, Management Consulting

I often feel overwhelmed and anxious, but I did at Amherst, too. I tend to channel this into breaking larger problems into smaller task lists that can reaffirm I am making progress and accomplishing work. There's always lingering "imposter syndrome" and questioning if I can really make a career out of this path, but sharing these doubts with my classmates made it obvious that almost everyone feels the same way. Classmates and outside of school friends are important for getting away from work and doing something fun! So are pets.

-- Class of ‘10, Healthcare/Biomedical Research

If you care about your job, and it's challenging and worth doing, then it's stressful. The trick is to accept the challenge and learn not to be stressed by it. A well-designed bridge handles a lot of weight, without incurring stress. A long distance bike rider finds a way to rest on the bike, calibrating energy output and calorie consumption. Work is the same. Starts with doing something you're actually interested in, with people whose company you enjoy; and then also budgeting in one's life time for OTHER STUFF like hobbies, friends, family so that when your world gets rocked at work it's not your whole universe.

-- Class of ‘94, Biotechnology

This is a natural part of any job. When things get overwhelming, I try to step back and re-prioritize the tasks to get done. And it is important not to be afraid to ask for help!

-- Class of ‘01, Healthcare Investing
One thing that has been especially helpful for me in handling the stress of graduate school and my postdoctoral position is recognizing that stress, imposter syndrome, and mental health issues are very common among those in my field. Many young scientists believe that any mistake or failure will completely doom their careers, and I certainly felt that way at times when my research was not going well. Normalizing these feelings and talking about them with others, both in my work community and in my social network, has been very helpful.

-- Class of ’07, Academic Research

I learned at an early point in my career that the best antidote to feeling overwhelmed is to work harder. Once I learned that lesson, I never was overwhelmed, but I did have some long work weeks! Work related stress comes from not having a clear game plan regarding what needs to be accomplished and how you are going to accomplish it. It can also come from an unwillingness or inability to delegate to skilled colleagues. So.....re stress, have a plan and a team and when in doubt know that most problems get better when you outwork them.

-- Class of ’81, Healthcare

It’s easy to feel overwhelmed when things happen to patients that are beyond your control. I have close colleagues whom I rely on for help and emotional support. I make time to maintain a close friend and family support network. And I also make time for a life outside of the hospital, including things like my dog and outdoor recreation.

-- Class of ’08, Medicine

When I feel overwhelmed, the people with whom I work closely usually notice. I’m lucky to have compassionate mentors with whom I can talk and from whom I can seek advice, and I have great friends who are patient and kind when I am struggling. It’s important to identify and cultivate a support network of mentors, peers, friends, and/or roommates who are happy to listen and provide support when one is feeling overwhelmed.

-- Class of ’16, Clinical Research

➔ You may feel less overwhelmed as you spend more time in your workplace and get more comfortable with your project and co-workers
➔ Make sure to maintain a life outside of your job and develop a support system that you can rely on
➔ Most people feel some amount of stress at their job—what’s important is to find healthy ways to manage your stress and to prevent yourself from becoming too overwhelmed
➔ Developing solid relationships with your supervisors and colleagues is important in ensuring you feel comfortable in asking for any support that you need
Dealing with Bias

I work in one of the most diverse places in the country. Most of the people that work at my company are not Caucasian like I am. They come from all over the world and interact in a very fluid environment. Most of them are considered brilliant in their respective fields. So no, I have not witnessed any racial bias. People are there based on their own merits regardless of race. Diversity is something that is embraced and appreciated where I work.

--- Class of ’79, Biotechnology

When I started, there were very few women in my company. It was a very boys-club environment. I guess I took small opportunities to be vocal about expressing women’s preferences and challenging the status quo of men’s preferences.

--- Class of ’08, Technology

I’m gay, and a woman—never noticed any bias, though until probably 5 years ago never noticed any proactive support either. In last 5 years, have found workplaces to be more proactively supportive. Am now at a 35 person startup, and do find the venture capital community and biotech CEO world to be extremely male. Generally very supportive males, but very few women, though hope this will gradually become less true. By the time current Amherst grads are ready to be biotech CEOs, it should be less extreme :-)

--- Class of ’94, Biotechnology

Just the opposite. Because the PHPDA is focused on addressing healthcare inequities, and because race is often a predictor of access and outcome disparities, our entire organizational process is geared to addressing systemic and institutional racism. I also worked for 20 years at Public Health - Seattle & King County, which has integrated an extraordinary equity and social justice initiative into all phases of their work. This is not to say that institutional racism does not find its way into our lives on a daily basis. It’s good to work in institutions that acknowledge this and actively seek to combat it.

--- Class of ’78, Healthcare Philanthropy

Minority scientists are underrepresented at all levels in my field, and the senior positions in particular are dominantly held by white men. Although I have not witnessed explicit bias or overt negativity towards minorities (though my experiences as a white woman may not reflect those of others in my field), I have seen many instances of implicit bias against women and minorities. For example, I have repeatedly had senior (white, male) leaders in the field
tell me that they believe that reverse sexism and reverse racism influence hiring decisions if the committees are allowed to consider race or gender. I often try to push back against these types of comments by individuals, and have advocated for implicit bias training for everyone who teaches or is on hiring committees, but I also recognize that my power to push for change is limited by being at an early career stage. In order to maintain my positivity about my colleagues and my work, I have found it helpful to discuss these issues with like-minded peers, both in person and through social media, which validates my experiences and helps me to find community in the science world.

-- Class of ’07, Academic Research

No, simply because my workplace is surprisingly diverse. My former supervisor is a Bosnian refugee. I worked with the children of Vietnam War refugees. I did notice that roles a pay grade or two above my level were predominantly white and male. Part of that is due to demographics: older people in science tend to hold PhDs and be male; however, the few women at the director level had to really fight for resources, despite having sterling academic backgrounds and leadership credentials. Notably, they have all left for startups. In my experience, tensions usually surface between genders. Chemistry still fosters a boy’s club mentality in some labs/circles. A chemical biology lab necessarily will intermingle synthetic chemists with cancer biology researchers who also happen to have a more balanced gender ratio. I have overheard and participated in discussions where someone’s achievements or rapport with others gets written off due to that person’s good looks. Obviously, this person is also a woman. Don’t really know what is the best way to handle it, but I approached them by calling them out and forcing them to explain why they are so uncharitable with their peer. This is probably a low yield approach, but it stops that vein of chatter.

-- Class of ‘12, Biotechnology

I haven’t noticed any, but being a straight white cisgender male there may be various microaggressions that I tend to miss. MIT has lots of Europeans, South and East Asians but very few black and Latino students as far as I can tell. As usual, it’s tough to say whether this is because of something bad MIT does specifically or because there aren’t very many black and Latino students coming up to the grad school pipeline because of bias/racism/whatever you want to call it earlier in life. I tend to the second explanation because MIT seems to me very welcoming to people of all genders, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, etc, but again I’m not sure I would notice if it was not in fact welcoming enough.

-- Class of ’14, Biological Engineering

→ In engineering or tech industries, females are usually in the minority
→ Find some sort of a community (either at the workplace or outside)
→ Working at places that value diversity can limit tension and bias
Possible Challenges

Just figuring out what you really want to do is the most important thing. I never knew how to figure that out without taking some time to explore things where they actually happen. I couldn't read a book about something and convince myself that I really knew what a day in the life of someone working in that field would be like - would it "feel" right for me? So I took four years off before deciding to enter medical school to do some traveling and to do some research, which I did in Boston at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. The things I learned in those four years shaped my decision-making for the rest of my career, in a positive way. I would give this advice...if you think you might be interested in something, figure out where they do the most cutting edge work in that field, and go there and do some work for 2-3 years to make sure that is what you really want to do, and also to understand which aspects of that work really interest you. It will not be time wasted.

-- Class of ‘79, Biotechnology

I hate to say it, but I am always surprised by how much gender bias I feel. The older white men I work with truly believe they don't have it and that it doesn't exist with them—but it does. Just not intentionally. Certain fields are better than others. Medicine is particularly prone to this. Much worse than other fields.

-- Class of ‘95, Healthcare

For my career, there are externalities over which one has little control. The principle source of research funding is NIH. It's budget has waxed and waned over my career. That can be challenging, particularly during leaner times.

-- Class of ‘80, Biomedical Research

Some of my grad school peers can be perceived as more successful due to publications, fellowships, awards, etc. I think a lot of factors that lead to the perceived success comes down to some grad students being luckier than others. I think it's important to be reminded of the role of luck in one's career.

-- Class of ‘12, Academia

People often assume I'm an administrative assistant of some kind and ask me to do things I think are unrelated to my job. I think there's a lot of tension between not wanting to seem like you're "above" doing work and setting professional boundaries at work. Especially because I transitioned from a technical role to something more operational, I have to constantly remind people that I was actually a math major, that I know technical things, etc. I do think a lot of it
has to do with being a woman, but I can't really get into people's brains when I think they're being sexist, so maybe it isn't. Since I started working, I've tried to stop apologizing and have more of a "radio DJ" voice than a questioning voice.

-- Class of '11, Computer Hardware

Science is really hard! You spend most of your time failing, because experiments are always having random irritating tiny things go wrong that wreck all the data. Many people told me this before I got to grad school but I didn't appreciate how true it was until a couple years after I got here. It's worth it though, because the few times you don't fail are amazing.

-- Class of '14, Biological Engineering

I think there's normally a few points in every software developer's career where one wonders what's next—engineering management? Moving up the individual contributor (i.e., primarily coding) track? Or pivoting into something obviously lateral, like product management, or something more out there, like venture capital work? There's also the aspect of whether to hold onto a position at the current place or moving on elsewhere, which is especially tempting to someone relatively fresh out of school (<5 years).

-- Class of '13, Software (Healthcare IT)

➔ Don't be afraid of uncertainty. Figuring out your career path takes a bit of risk and luck
➔ Success may be contingent on chance more than anything. Don't be discouraged if your peers “outperform” you—there may be multiple externalities outside of your control
➔ Advocate for yourself. Don't undersell your skillset
➔ Failure is a part of the process!
General Advice

Take your time to figure out what you really want to do, and yes, by all means, follow your passion. My job is hard. Developing a diagnostic to guide therapy selection for cancer patients and proving that it works is hard. But it's never boring. I never have the sense that what I am doing is a waste of time. It's always worth my best effort, it's worth my time, it's worth my full engagement. Most importantly, it's full of promise and the potential that a cure is lying just around the bend. For me, this is the most important thing. Many years after entering medical school, it's very clear to me why medical practice was never going to hold the same excitement for me that research and development does. But that's an individual decision that each of us has to make for him/herself. So make sure you take the time to figure that out before launching into a career without the self-awareness you need to really be happy doing what you choose to do. This part cannot be overstated...you have to be happy with your choice. There are many ways to contribute to the progress we make as scientists in many different fields. Find one that allows you to be happy.

-- Class of '79, Biotechnology

A few things. Realize that you will in all likelihood have several different positions with different organizations over your first five or so years after college. Use each as an opportunity to learn and observe, for example, by asking more senior people what they like about their jobs/careers and what skills and personal traits are required to succeed in the field. Also, stay alert to what you don't like about a particular job. No job is perfect, but you can use this knowledge of "dissatisfiers" to help plot your career course. Finally, learn how to solicit and act on feedback so you become a stronger employee and leader.

-- Class of '71, Management Consulting

Science and math skills open many, many doors and develop a way of thinking about how we know and can test things practically. But do not neglect developing the ability to write coherent, clear, grammatical sentences and being able to speak in front of people. I have seen some truly terrible writing in personal statements and research proposals that detract from potentially brilliant candidates and research ideas.

-- Class of '10, Healthcare/Biomedical Research

Careers are long, windy paths, and the most interesting things you'll end up doing in your life are likely impossible for you to see or even to imagine for yourself from where you are today. In taking the first role after Amherst (and the next one after that, and the next one) think about each one as a step along a footpath, that should be bringing you each time toward
whatever seems cool to do or learn at that time in your life, and that will help you see further down more new paths. Live your life like a flower that bends toward the sun—be aware of when you're enjoying work (and why), when you're NOT enjoying work (and why) and try to maximize the proportion of stuff that makes you happy. It's not rocket science; but it's hardest to remember to keep that perspective when you're in the middle of a career start or change.

-- Class of ‘94, Biotechnology

I used to respond to work by feeling a need to demonstrate that I was intelligent. What I have realized over time, is that truly intelligent people are always seen that way (even if you don't realize it) and it is better to just do your job and not care about that. People see a lot more than you realize—even if they don't say it. Emotional intelligence is often more important.

-- Class of ‘95, Healthcare

If you are not sure what you want to do, pursue what interests you. There is no telling where it will take you. Looking back, it all may make perfect sense but at the beginning of your career, what may look like either limitless opportunities - or no opportunities at all - can be overwhelming. It was for me. Life requires compromises, but try and be aware of what you are compromising - and why. A good friend recently said to me, “there is nothing worse than becoming very good at something you do not like.” If you got to Amherst and made it through four years there, you could not have done either of those things without already possessing the capability to succeed in this world. You have an unbelievable gift in the skills and aptitude that got you in and got you through. You are already in the top 1% of your fellow Americans (or citizens of your country of origin). It can be scary and intimidating, but trust in yourself and follow you interest.

-- Class of ‘75, Healthcare

I'd like to emphasize the importance of connections and a professional network in finding positions in clinical research. The best way to maximize your options is to build alumni and other connections and look for positions in locations you may not have thought to look. When I went to Nebraska, I had no connection to that state, but that work dramatically shaped my future. It’s also important to start looking for jobs and internships early, figuring out your options and tapping into your network in the fall for summer and gap year work.

-- Class of ‘16, Clinical Research
Prepare for your software technical interview well! Typically, people want complete and inelegant answers rather than incomplete but well-reasoned ones — though what an interviewer looks for depends on both the disposition of the interviewer herself and the general corporate culture. (Firms with a reputation for being in the "high technology" field probably care a lot about runtime, say; firms that are more business-oriented probably want a solution.)

Know the terminology — my first few interviews languished because I didn't read up on the practical terminology of software engineering (that which is learnt outside of the classroom) as much as I should've. Things like inheritance vs. composition, trade-offs between languages, different project planning methodologies in so far as software development is concerned...these are rarely mentioned in a liberal arts college's computer science curriculum but are often useful to learn, even if it's just to know the jargon of the world you may be entering.

-- Class of '13, Software (Healthcare IT)

➔ Find a career that you're passionate about. If you love your work, it's not work
➔ Absorb as much as you can from each job you undertake. You'll get a better picture of your strengths/weaknesses and likes/dislikes
➔ Refine your writing skills so you can clearly and eloquently articulate your ideas
➔ Don't underestimate the value of networking! Many positions are filled via personal connections
➔ Prepare beyond the classroom material for interviews. Read up on study guides online
Examples of Career Paths

Career paths are rarely linear. You may shift industries multiple times and hold positions you may not have originally considered. Featured below are the stories of several alumni, some of whom were committed to a STEM career in college, some of whom ended up in STEM after their interest in the field evolved over time.

Class of ’79, Biotechnology

Career Path: I trained at some great institutions (UCSF, Harvard, Duke, University of Washington) with the intention of being an academic physician focused on research, patient care, and teaching at a medical school. I realized that the best way for me to make a real impact on patient care was to do it in industry. So I moved to industry and learned, quite to my surprise, that diagnostics was really the missing piece of the puzzle. My first real industry job was at a company working on HIV drug resistance. I learned so much about it that one day I woke up and was considered an "expert" in Personalized Medicine. From there, it was easy to understand the similarities between what we were doing in HIV and the problems that cancer biologists were confronting in their search for effective cancer treatments.

Recruitment Process: Accidental. I had an NIH grant and was working away at my faculty job, seeing patients and performing very basic experiments in the lab that were focused on gene expression in viruses. Then I ran into an old friend from UCSF who had abandoned academia and moved to industry. He convinced me that industry was the only place where I could use all of my training (I am trained in Internal Medicine, Cardiology, Infectious Diseases, and Oncology), and the best place for me to use my creative talents to solve real clinical problems.

Starting the Job: Confusing. It takes a while to understand how companies are organized and all the different functions that have to work together to get anything done. Unlike academia where the focus is on individual accomplishment, in industry all successes are team successes. Teamwork and collaboration are incredibly important.

Class of ’94, Biotechnology

Career Path: I went into strategy management consulting post Amherst, working initially across lots of industries, whatever was assigned to me. Post MBA, I wanted to start focusing in one industry and to move out of consulting into a real company. I was attracted to biopharma because of the unparalleled complexity of discovering, developing, and marketing drugs globally; it seemed like an industry I could go to where there would always be something new and interesting to solve. Now I lead business development, corporate strategy, portfolio
strategy, market assessments, and program management. I am also a member of the executive team, so I’m involved in the general running of the company.

Starting the Job: Didn't know the industry well, or the company. Listened a lot, made lists of things my boss asked me to do, clarified prioritization when it seemed like too much. Generally, jumped in, and asked questions when I had them.

Class of ’82, Non-profit Environmental Organization

Career Path: I worked in Yellowstone National Park for two summers while I was at Amherst, and decided then that I wanted to pursue conservation work. I also thought that planning work for parks wouldn't be very interesting to me so I decided to pursue a technical degree which led me to MIT in a 3-2 program. Now, I work to promote conservation of sensitive Arctic lands and waters. That means commenting on policies and permits, writing reports, speaking to the media and utilizing social media, educating the public so they can weigh in, and other tactics.

Class of ’75, Healthcare

Career Path: I was not one of those people who always knew what they wanted to do. My 'major' hovered between philosophy, political science, and landed on religion. That choice was a blend of my personal interests, the times I was living in, and the Religion faculty at Amherst and the Five College area. I had a fairly catastrophic accident that landed me in the hospital for 60 days, followed by 6 months in a body cast, one year in a brace and another year in rehabilitation. Through that experience, I saw what medicine did for me. I wanted to do for others what my medical team did for me, and found I had an interest and aptitude in solving problems in the practice - workflow, front office, back office, physician recruitment, etc. I advanced from larger opportunity to larger opportunity, earned an MBA and rose to corporate chief medical officer of a managed care company with $14 billion annual revenues. My 'career path' was determined by following my interests wherever it took me and was fueled by hard work. As for exit opportunities, I chose to leave when the work started taking more from me than it was giving back.

Class of ’81, Healthcare

Career Path: I am a CEO at Advanced ICU Care. I chose a career in business because I felt like it gave the most options to find an enjoyable professional niche. I had no specific designs on getting into health care, and essentially stumbled into healthcare. From there I built 7-8 year careers at a couple of companies and built some very nice successes. Once you have some bona fide success, interesting opportunities seem somewhat easier to find.
Recruitment Process: I acquired a skill that was in demand and perhaps with some networking where I might learn about opportunities, I was sought after. With hard work earning a reputation for favorable results, the opportunities came to me.

Class of ’78, Healthcare (Philanthropy)

Career Path: I majored in theatre at Amherst and received my MFA in Acting from the Yale School of Drama upon graduation. During the onset of the AIDS epidemic in New York City, I started volunteering at Gay Men’s Health Crisis, working with teams of volunteers providing emotional and social services to persons living with AIDS. It was a life-changing experience. After several years of volunteering, I went to Columbia School of Public Health, where I earned my MPH in Sociomedical Sciences. I worked for 30 years in the HIV/AIDS field before coming to the Pacific Hospital Preservation & Development Authority. Now as the Executive Director of the PHPDA, I oversee our grantmaking processes that provide funding to programs in King County, WA that help address health care access and outcome inequalities. We fund programs addressing health disparities based on race, income, immigrant/refugee status, language, gender, sexual orientation, geography, homelessness, and other factors.

Recruitment Process: I was interviewed by a headhunter the organization had engaged, and went through a series of interviews with a hiring committee, the PHPDA staff, and the full board of directors.

Class of ’95, Healthcare (Population Health)

Career Path: I always considered being a physician. I was drawn to science in general and realized early on that I was not someone who could sit at a desk all day. In terms of the part of the field I am in—that has evolved over time. I have not taken a straight path but it has evolved. Now, I am Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Chief Medical Value Officer for CareMount Medical. I help the organization transition from traditional healthcare finances and focus to one that is more around value and preventative services.

Starting the Job: This is a place that I find perpetually needs work. I find that in this job—as well as in my past jobs, no one really does anything to help you figure it out.

Class of ’16, Clinical Research

Career Path: I spent the summer of 2015 doing infection prevention research at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. There I realized how important seeing patients is to me and that an MD would allow me to see patients and do important research. I looked for positions for my gap years that would allow me to understand the long-term realities of performing clinical research as a physician, so I was looking at large research hospitals for
research coordinator positions. Currently, I manage chronic pain clinical trials at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center for a team of physicians; writing abstracts, papers, and textbook chapters.

**Recruitment Process:** These jobs are often filled through word of mouth and connections, and many positions are already filled by the time they appear on human resources pages and public advertisements. The NIH has one of the most formal application systems. One submits an application into a large database of applicants, and investigators sift through applications to find people. Because there are thousands of applications, it's important to reach out to investigators with whom one wants to work to express specific interest.

**Class of ’11, Computer Hardware**

**Career Path:** I manage the project plan for a custom supercomputer and manage relationships with vendors.

**Recruitment Process:** Finding headhunters is incredibly helpful -- they have an in with the companies and you're much more likely to get an interview if you go through them (same with an internal reference).

**Class of ’13, Software (Healthcare IT)**

**Career Path:** I had previously worked at a division of IBM doing software engineer in test work ("QA engineering"). I'd become deeply tired and bored with that, so I did the natural move to software development. I'd always loved computing and thinking about software, so it was a natural fit for me, though not the usual path of an Amherst grad. Nowadays, I work at athenahealth in a 50/50 split between managing the software development lifecycle and writing code towards our product. Informally, there's a lot of product/project management work that I and other developers take up, especially since our work is fairly technical in subject matter that is outside the expertise of our (non-technical) product owners and managers.

**Starting the Job:** The first week was mostly indoctrination into the company, so to speak -- athenahealth carves out the first four days of the five days of formal training as New Hire Orientation at Point Lookout in Maine explaining what it is the company does. The last day was an extremely informal developers' session explaining how to get into the codebase, etc.

- Ending up in STEM is often serendipitous; don't be discouraged if your career path isn't precisely what you envisioned
- Network with alumni and headhunters to position yourself during recruiting
- Expect minimal instruction and a steep learning curve when you first start working
Alumni Contacts in STEM

We encourage you to reach out to Amherst alumni for advice. You can search for alumni and their contact information in the Alumni Directory on the school website. Results can be filtered by multiple parameters, including class year, region, graduate school, major, employment industry, employer name, and more. **All members of the Amherst community must abide by Amherst's Terms & Conditions of Use and are prohibited from using biographical information commercially or to send unsolicited bulk e-mail.**