



Newsletter

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Terrestrial feedbacks and Earth system models

Early-Career Scientist (ECS) Page

interview



Joshua Fisher is a Research Scientist at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory of NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration)/CalTech (California University of Technology) in Los Angeles, California. He studied Environmental Sciences at the University of California, Berkeley, USA, and received his PhD in 2006.

Erika Zardin is a PhD student at the University of Western Australia in Perth, Australia. Her field is analytical atmospheric chemistry, and her current research focuses on online measurements of volatile organic compounds (VOC) in ambient air of Western Australia.

How do you feel about the opportunities currently out there for ECSs?

Joshua: At the early-career stage there are plenty of post-doc opportunities. I think right now there is more money coming from the top looking for capable ECSs than there is the workforce available to fill these positions. I guess it makes sense that it's difficult to synch the job opportunities and the lag time in training perfectly.

Erika: I agree that the availability of fellowships and small grants for ECSs in Earth System Science is greater than the number of viable candidates. On the other hand, these short-term and high-throughput research opportunities require the ECS to work very hard and frequently relocate abroad. In my experience, this mobility and exclusive dedication to science places a demand on personal and familiar relationships.

Joshua: However, the permanent job situation is difficult because of the depressed global economy. Things are starting to rebound, but for the most part hard money positions are still hard to come by.

Erika: Add to this the extreme competition for acquiring and retaining an academic or research positions on the long-term, for which the continued scientific and financial support (and ultimately a tenure position) are not even guaranteed! I would like the career path of ECSs to become less dependent from chance or influenced by local interests, whilst rewarding the actual research (and teaching talent) demonstrated by the young scientist/academic.

Any advice for PhD students and soon-to-become ECSs?

Erika: Reach out to network with peers and leading scientist in your area early in your career. Seek exposure, objective criticism and feedback on your research from other researchers, and even from the broad public. Avoid getting too embedded in your research niche, by narrowly specialising in your current research topic alone. True "multi- and interdisciplinarity" is a mindset.

Joshua: Publish, publish, publish. Other than that, I went with a post-doc instead of a permanent position straight out of grad school because that was highly recommended by a lot of people I respect. You learn new skills, develop new networks, and build a core of research without necessarily getting bogged down in teaching, meetings, and such.