Environmental Law: A Career for the Creative

Acid rain, global warming, solid and hazardous waste management, wildlife and wetlands preservation ... these are a few of the recent environmental issues that have captured the attention of the media and the American public. Increasingly over the past few years, stiff penalties are being levied against those who violate environmental laws and rules.

As an environmental lawyer for PSI Energy, Inc. (headquartered in Plainfield, Indiana), Barbara Fruehling Gambill ('85 J.D. from Indiana University) works to ensure that PSI Energy is in compliance with state/federal laws and regulations which protect the air, water, and land. When asked about her profession, Barbara says:

"Because environmental law is a relatively new field, many of today's practicing environmental lawyers, including myself, don't have scientific backgrounds. Many actually began their practice in an entirely different area of the law. Then, over the last several years, environmental regulation by both the federal government and the states expanded. And, the consequences for non-compliance became increasingly severe. The public and the regulated community became more conscious of environmental issues, creating a great demand for environmental lawyers. Lawyers in other substantive areas stepped in to fill that demand."

"What type of person makes a successful environmental lawyer? Because of the technical complexity of many regulatory issues facing environmental lawyers today, possessing a biology or other science degree is certainly helpful," says Barbara. "The profession requires someone who is analytical and methodical in problem-solving, but creative and flexible as well. Communication skills, both written and oral, are crucial. On any given day, you may find yourself negotiating a permit with a governmental agency, submitting written comments on proposed regulations, discussing environmental compliance with a site manager, or even arguing a case before a judge. It's important to realize that environmental law isn't an office-bound job!"

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Undergraduate Research Opportunities in Medical Sciences

Since high school, Steve Crawford has set his sights on medical school. Now, as a senior in the biology core program, he's extremely close to fulfilling his goal. "Biology has always been my interest area," comments Steve, "because the subject matter deals with real life, tangible things you can see and touch."

During his sophomore year at IU, Steve wanted to gain experience working in a lab where medical research was being conducted. In the Handbook of Undergraduate Research Opportunities (available in the Biology Advising Office, JH A115), Steve read that Dr. John Watkins conducted research on diabetes mellitus and the elimination of chemicals from the body. Viewing these types of activities as potentially valuable to his future, Steve asked Dr. Watkins to serve as his research mentor.

As a current member of John Watkins' research team, Steve comments:

"I enjoy the one-on-one relationship I have with Dr. Watkins. My experience in his lab has been a far different approach than walking into a lecture room of 100 or 300 students!"

"Excellent preparation for medical school," says Steve Crawford (right) about his experience in Dr. John Watkins research lab.

"As a freshman, many students don't know which college major to select or what special skills and knowledge are required for certain fields. Therefore, I feel it's wise to wait until the end of the freshman year before actually entering a research lab. However, it's never too soon to investigate your options!"

"In Dr. Watkins' lab, I've had the opportunity to see the complete research process from theory and idea through the laboratory and into clinical situations. This will be most valuable when I'm a practicing physician ... I'll have the overall view!"

Steve Crawford is the 1991 recipient of the Dana Corporation Scholarship and the Carl H. Eigenmann Scholarship. Criteria for both awards are based on scholarly achievement and zoological or other biological research. During the 1991-92 academic year, Steve has also been appointed as an Undergraduate Teaching Intern for L100 Humans and the Biological World.

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"Environmental lawyers may practice law with a state or federal governmental agency, with a corporation, or with a private law firm. Compensation will depend upon the policies of the particular employer, as well as years of experience, educational background, and other variables. An appropriate salary range for someone with 0-5 years experience might be from $25,000 to $65,000, at least in the Midwest."

What are the professional rewards?

"My greatest rewards," comments Barbara, "come from working to understand, interpret, and apply new laws and regulations. And, practicing preventive law to make sure that problems don't even occur."