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Geography grads take on world

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By Angela McCarthy

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While most job descriptions don't say "geographers should apply", there are a lot of career options for geography graduates.

Water quality, statistics, immigration, eco-tourism, music, population, planning – all involve geography graduates, says Colin McLeay, Waikato University senior lecturer in geography, tourism and environmental planning.

"Yet when you mention geography to people, they start talking about rote learning the capitals of the world."

As environmental scientist for Beca consultancy, Nigel Mather advises engineering sectors regarding the environmental impact on projects as diverse as roads, commercial structures, contaminated land investigation and water quality management.

With Auckland's Tank Farm development, Mather's role is to investigate the soil and ground water; testing to help with disposal and construction options. He is also working on an Albany stormwater pond treatment plant being developed into a park-like civic centre. "We're monitoring the construction and liaising between site contractors and the North Shore City Council."

He particularly enjoys the diversity and outside work opportunities.

"I'm on site a few hours every third day with the Albany job. The Tank Farm involved field work for a couple of weeks – taking samples, doing drilling and getting samples analysed. Then I was back in the office writing up reports on results."

Mather started at Beca two years ago after completing a Master of Science in geography through the Earth Science Department at Auckland University. While his thesis on coastal evolution didn't directly correlate with Beca's core business of engineering, it was interested in his geography skill base.

"I learned general scientific principles of ground investigations and things like logging soils (making notes). Those things cross over."

When Mather finished his undergraduate science degree in geology and geography, he worked a year at the Rodney District Council consents section before moving to a water and air quality sampling role at Watercare. He did a masters because he felt he wasn't getting the opportunities he wanted. "Postgraduate study developed my confidence and communication skills and has made me more technically proficient and better at self-management."

Durekha Sridhar started her job as air quality scientist at the Auckland Regional Council 18 months ago. The role involves managing a database of emissions of air pollution sources in the region, along with tasks such as developing sheets for public information. "I've got GIS (geographic information systems) experience too, so I also do a bit of mapping."

She says her degree has developed skills in monitoring, research and data analysis. Communication skills were also honed at university.



At Auckland's Tank Farm geographers investigate the soil and ground water. Photo / Kenny Rodger

Tank Farm future

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