



Paige Lavin

Oceanographer



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What does an oceanographer do?

In my job as an oceanographer, I work to better understand the ocean's role in climate change. Most of my research involves combining data from satellites, research cruises, and autonomous robotic drifters known as Argo floats to study the physics of the ocean. As a member of the NASA/NOAA Jason/Sentinel-6 Ocean Surface Topography Science Team, I work with data from our satellites that measure the height of the sea surface (i.e., the "sea level").

How is your job a space job?

I use satellite data to tease out how the ocean is responding to climate change. It might seem like it would be harder to study the ocean from space than just going out in a boat and taking measurements, but observing the ocean from space allows us to do a lot of research that would be much more expensive and difficult to do from ships.

What kind of impact does your job have?

Monitoring the ocean from space is one way that NOAA provides services to the public on a daily basis. NOAA's National Weather Service relies on these satellite measurements to generate daily weather and sea state forecasts. In our lab, we are working with hurricane forecasters to improve their forecasts of hurricane intensity by including information from our new ocean heat content maps.

What was one of the biggest challenges you've faced and overcame in becoming an oceanographer?

Since college, I've had to manage several chronic health issues which have often forced me to modify my working environment and schedule. Luckily, since most of the data I use are from satellites or robotic sensors others deploy in the ocean, I can still be an oceanographer without having to go into the field constantly.



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What were your interests when you were growing up?

Growing up in Northern California, I dragged my parents to the beach every chance I could get. Initially, I was fascinated by the critters in the tide pools and spent much of my free time reading books all about these fascinating creatures. Over time I became more interested in the ocean as a whole and understanding simple questions like "Why is the Pacific cold by Northern California but warm by Hawaii?". This drew me towards studying the physics of the ocean in grad school and ultimately to my current position at NOAA.

What are some of the classes you should take to become an oceanographer?

Specialized classes in earth science and oceanography are particularly helpful for becoming an oceanographer. However, it is important to also have a solid background in physics, math, and computer science to be able to properly analyze the data we get from satellites and be able to use it to better understand the climate system. Additionally, it is essential to not skimp on humanities courses, especially ones focused on communication and writing, so that you can properly communicate your science to the public!