Help people conduct and use science, responsibly. Patent and intellectual property law deals with protecting people's rights to inventions and designs. Science policy experts apply scientific knowledge to the creation of policies in an effort to best serve the public. Regulatory affairs professionals ensure that companies abide by all laws and regulations. Each of these areas involves expert scientific knowledge combined with the ability to read and write highly detailed laws, policies & procedures.

Alumni Spotlight

What did you do as a trainee to prepare for your current career?

As a trainee, I tried to find time to pursue at least a few activities related to politics and policy. For example, I worked to be an advocate for research funding, and I volunteered to be a trainee representative for my professional society's public policy committee. More generally, I do think that my scientific education has been incredibly helpful in my new career. In graduate school, I honed my abilities to evaluate evidence and to think critically and rationally about complex subjects. Also, studying evolution in particular gave me a deep appreciation of history. These academic competencies have proven to be transferable, and I am endeavoring to put them to good use in the policy world.

What are the typical things your job entails each day?

My day-to-day schedule varies quite a bit, but a typical day consists of meetings and a fair amount of writing. One of my main tasks is to keep track of bills making their way through Congress that might have some impact on researchers in the biological sciences, and then share that information with our constituent societies. I also go to a lot of different kinds of meetings in order to learn about forthcoming science policy proposals and budgets, and to make the case for increased basic research funding.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

The most rewarding part of my job is the feeling that our organization is actually having a positive impact on the scientific community. There is a lot of cynicism about our government these days, but I can now see that advocates for science do have an effect on legislators and can help them to make informed decisions. This is very gratifying to see, even if positive change is often incremental and takes a great deal of time.

Interview courtesy of the University of Chicago.
Sample Job Titles

- Patent agent
- Intellectual property lawyer/attorney
- Policy advisor/coordinator/officer/analyst/fellow
- Public affairs officer
- Government relations
- Regulatory/compliance director/officer/associate
- Quality control specialist
- Technology transfer agent/officer/specialist

Professional Organizations

American Intellectual Property Law Association (AIPLA)
http://www.aipla.org

Regulatory Affairs Professionals Society (RAPS)
http://www.raps.org

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)
http://www.aaas.org

The Center of Science, Policy and Society Programs (CSPSP)
http://www.aaas.org/