

Careers Beyond Academia: Technology Transfer

Dr. Magdalena Morgan is a Licensing associate at VCU Innovation Gateway, where she reviews scientific inventions, files patents and negotiates licensing agreements. In this informational interview, Dr. Morgan shares her journey from the bench to a successful Licensing Associate in technology transfer.



1. Please describe your professional background?

I have M.Sc. in Biotechnology (Molecular Biology) and Ph.D. in Biochemistry and Biophysics. After I graduated with my Ph.D., I did 2.5 years of postdoc (two different labs) and then I did 2 years of internship in technology transfer office. After that I got full time, faculty position as a licensing associate.

2. How did you decide this career path was best suited for you?

I attended a career seminar and heard a licensing associate describe the technology transfer, what they do and how they help researchers to translate their research into products on the market. I was fascinated by it and I applied for the internship in the technology transfer office at VCU to see if that would be the right fit for me.

3. What helped you get your first job as a licensing associate?

The internship I did in the office for two years. It allowed me to get all the skills and experience that are necessary to do the job. It let me build all key relationships with inventors/researchers, university leaders and community members. It also helped my employers to get to know my, how I work, how I fit into the team and how I handle difficult situations.

4. Any skills that you picked as a PhD that helped you in this role?

Independence, troubleshooting, searching for alternative solutions.

5. What were the challenges that you faced during the transition into this role?

I had no knowledge about business and legal side of the job I do now. I negotiate legal/business agreements every day and I had to learn that skill from the ground zero. It was very challenging at the beginning, but became the favorite part of my job quickly.

6. What is your typical day like?

Every day is different. I spent my days reviewing invention disclosures, meeting with researchers/clinicians, meeting with lawyers, industry representatives and community members. I review patents and perform patentability assessments. I negotiate financial terms and legalities

in licensing agreements. I also give lectures and educational seminars to faculty, staff and students. I attend conferences and participate in panel discussions.

7. What is the most challenging part about this role?

The amount of work that needs to be done every day and the limited resources (time including) I have.

8. What is the most exciting aspect of this career?

Seeing our inventions reach the market. Seeing new drugs, new diagnostics or new devices that were developed at our institution, to go to market and benefit the public.

9. Any specific points to consider when choosing this career?

You have to be able to multitask on the completely new level. Most of the times we have multiple projects going on at the same time, often all of them being high priority, so they have to be handled immediately. It's a very stressful job, we negotiate multi-million dollar agreements, we handle very sensitive proprietary information, and when things get heated, you need to be able to handle yourself and think on your feet.

10. Any suggestions on getting experience for this position that will help postdocs transition into this role?

The only way to get experience (and to know if it's the job for you) is to do the internship in technology transfer office. I recommend it to be at least 12 months long, because that how long it takes to learn all the new skills and to get comfortable with the job.