In this month’s article, I hope to inform young graduates on what they can expect from a consulting industry job. First a little background about me: I am a Senior Agronomist/Agricultural Engineer for Formation Environmental, LLC in Sacramento, CA. After obtaining my Ph.D. in Agronomy in 2013, my first stint was a two-year, fixed-term position as an assistant research scientist in a university system. Following that, I received three on-campus interviews, but none of those resulted in job offers. In contrast, I interviewed for two jobs in the consulting industry, and guess what, I got offers from both. This does not mean that I was not competent for an academic job or that my skill set was meant for industry. Rather, it says that my skill set is versatile enough to cater to either of the job requirements. Hence, I ended up with my present job, which after almost a decade in academia, was an easy choice for me. Below, I summarize my experiences to show that the transition from academia to industry is not a shock but a pleasant, rewarding adventure.

Industry Seeks Advanced Education and Skill Sets

My initial impression was that an advanced M.S. or Ph.D. degree would only open avenues in universities or federal and state research agencies. This myth was soon broken when I joined Formation and learned that 20% of our staff have Ph.D. degrees, and around 60% have M.S. degrees. I got the revelation that the consulting industry performs state-of-art research, which is focused toward solving the client’s problem. Now, instead of writing a peer-reviewed paper, I generate detailed technical memos and reports that summarize my research. The problems we strive to solve are multifaceted, and my education and skills are strengthened by the rest of the team I work with. The included picture shows the talented team I work every day, which includes experts in agronomy, pedology, crop physiology, ecology, hydrology, soil science, forestry, horticulture, hydrology, and GIS.

Flexibility and Diversity

There is never a time for boredom in consulting. At any point, you might work on five different projects. Trying to draw an analog to an academic position would be unfair. In academia, you will have advising, service, proposals, research, teaching, extension, manuscripts, and many other varied roles. In industry, you use your expertise and apply it to different projects, and since most of the work requires the diversity of a team, the load is fairly distributed. There is also the flexibility to pursue new opportunities, start new projects, and explore a wide array of tools. In my company, there is also a great deal of support and encouragement provided to staff wishing to pursue higher education.