I graduated from Carleton with a double major in math and studio art in 2004, and since that time I've been working for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), part of the US Department of Transportation, in Washington, D.C. As a Contracting Officer, I’m responsible for awarding and administering contracts, cooperative agreements, and grants that support the programs of FHWA, particularly including the highway research program. Acquisitions I’ve participated in range from small purchases of supplies researchers need to do their job, to large contracts covering support of entire research laboratories, to highway construction grants under the Recovery Act.

I became a Contract Specialist by searching and applying for Federal jobs using the usajobs.gov website, which remains the portal for pretty much all Federal jobs available to the public. I learned the specifics of my job series (“1102”) through extensive on-the-job professional training. In hiring, my math background was considered an asset, because it facilitated learning to conduct cost and price analysis, trade-off analysis, fee determinations, etc. However, the field of acquisitions requires using multiple skill sets every day—effective communication with a wide range of customers, contractors, and recipients, the ability to read and edit highly technical work specifications, strong writing skills with which to document every decision, problem solving to work through negotiated business solutions... in short, it's a great career for someone who likes to use all different parts of her brain.