

# What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up? Careers in the Marine and Maritime Field



*Last summer, Fionna was a ship's officer on the NOAA ship Hi'ialakai, based out of Hawaii.*

## NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps

The **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration** (NOAA) has ships that take scientists to sea to collect **oceanographic, atmospheric, hydrographic, fisheries, and coastal data**. These ships are run by officers in the NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps, one of the seven uniformed services of the United States. (The others are the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, and the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.) NOAA Corps officers must be American citizens and have a college degree in science, math, or engineering.

When Fionna Matheson was growing up in Florida, she spent a lot of time playing and exploring at the beach and estuaries near where she lived. When she was in high school, she did whatever she could to learn more about marine science, including taking summer classes and joining her school's marine science club. In college, she majored in biology and went to sea for the first time on a Sea Education Association (based in Woods Hole, MA) sailing research ship for a semester. One summer, she worked as an intern at an aquarium.



*LT Fionna Matheson on watch on Hi'ialakai's bridge.*

After college, Fionna learned about NOAA online when she was searching for government jobs in marine science. In addition to operating ships, NOAA officers are also scientists and engineers who, when not assigned to a ship, work in labs or offices all over the country and around the world. There is even a NOAA Corps officer who serves as station chief at the South Pole.

Fionna was accepted into the Corps and was sent to Basic Officer Training for three months, where she learned all about NOAA, basic seamanship, and navigation. Because ships at sea need to be totally self-sufficient in case of emergency, all NOAA officers are trained in firefighting and first aid as well. Fionna was then sent to her first ship for two years, where she continued her training in ship operations, but she also learned about the scientific instruments and equipment that the scientists use to collect data and conduct experiments. Today, NOAA assigns officers to their first ship for three years and then sends them to a job ashore for two. After that, they rotate between land and sea assignments approximately every two years. Fionna's assignment right now is ashore in a fisheries research lab in California that studies dolphins and sea turtles. She spends one day a week in a small boat with two or three other scientists, taking photos of bottlenose dolphins—to try to identify specific ones—and assists other scientists in collecting biopsies and *acoustic*, or sound, recordings. Back in the lab, she analyzes the data they've collected, organizes the photos, writes reports, and works on their web site.

If Fionna stays with the Corps for her career, she'll work towards becoming a ship's Operations Officer, Executive Officer, or Commanding Officer; and ashore, she can advance to various research and management positions within NOAA. If you like science and ships and the sea, the **NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps** might be the place for you. See [www.noaacorps.noaa.gov/recruiting/](http://www.noaacorps.noaa.gov/recruiting/). ⚓

**GLOSSARY:** *oceanography*—science that studies the ocean; *hydrography*—science that studies the characteristics of a body of water, including charting bodies of water; *atmospheric*—relating to the mass of air that surrounds the earth.



*All NOAA Corps officers are trained firefighters.*