TIBBS Career Blitz – February 2013

Career Profile – Karen Cranston, PhD

What is your current title and how long have you worked in your current job?
Training Coordinator and Bioinformatics Project Manager at NESCent, the National Evolutionary Synthesis Center. I’ve been here since October 2010.

Where did you get your PhD and what discipline was it in?
I got my PhD at the University of Alberta in the Department of Medical Genetics, studying phylogenetics - statistical and computational methods for inferring how species are related to each other based on sequence data.

Did you do a postdoc?
Yes, two: the first at the University of Arizona in Tucson and a second at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago.

What are your main daily responsibilities?
I work with scientists to understand their informatics needs (data management, programming, databases, etc.) and then communicate those needs to developers; I coordinate the summer workshop program at NESCent and also lead a multi-institution research grant. I would like to spend more time writing code and less time on conference calls. ;)

What are the keys to success in your career field?
Keeping up with new research, technology and methods; being collaborative

What were the most important factors in choosing your career path?
This job allows me to be both an evolutionary biologist and a geek, all in a unique academic setting. I get to collaborate with many different people from a variety of academic fields.

What 1 or 2 pieces of advice do you have for people who want to land a job like yours?
There are plenty of opportunities for someone with both domain knowledge and informatics skills. Advice: demonstrate that you can collaborate across domains; get involved with an open source programming project; tell your colleagues what kind of job you want (I got more leads when I was clear about not wanting a tenure-track job).