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January 14, 2021

Given the change of course that has happened in the world, we wanted to provide expert opinions on what aspiring graduates can do to start off their careers in an uncertain economic climate. We wanted to know what skills will be more important, where the economy is doing relatively well, and if there will be any lasting effects on the job market.

Companies are looking for candidates that can handle the new responsibilities of the job market. Recent graduates actually have an advantage because they are comfortable using newer technologies and have been communicating virtually their whole lives. They can take what they've learned and apply it immediately.

We spoke to professors and experts from several universities and companies to get their opinions on where the job market for recent graduates is heading, as well as how young graduates entering the industry can be adequately prepared. Here are their thoughts.

### Our Panel of Experts



**Daniel Ludwigsen**  
Kettering University



**Patrick Drohan Ph.D.**  
Pennsylvania State University

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**Dr. Tanea Reed Ph.D.**  
Eastern Kentucky University



**Dr. Rainer Glaser**  
Missouri University of Science and  
Technology



**Dr. Bruce Huckell Ph.D.**  
University of New Mexico

C

**Christopher Bae Ph.D.**  
University of Hawaii at Manoa

B

**Benjamin Ford**  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

A

**Dr. Alexandra Gorgevska Ph.D.**  
Palm Beach State College



**John Wilbur Ph.D.**  
University of Arizona



**Glen P. Miller**  
The University of New Hampshire's  
Central Science



**Mohammad Saadeh Ph.D.**  
Southeastern Louisiana University



**Gerald Bergtrom Ph.D.**  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

**DANIEL LUDWIGSEN**

Department Head, Associate Professor of Physics  
Kettering University  
Physics Department

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**What are the biggest trends we'll see in the Laboratory Technician job market given the pandemic?**

**Daniel Ludwigen:** In responding to this and other questions, I'm considering the perspective of graduates from my programs, with a bachelor's degree in Engineering Physics or Applied Physics. Most of our grads are looking at full-time positions in engineering, particularly R&D and product development, or consulting/project engineering directly with their employers' customers. In sectors that are in demand, these positions are seeing an accelerated shift in the ways of working—just like we see in most professions. Working at least a portion of the week at home, less travel, more video conferencing, all force employees to sharpen their essential skills in communication, project management, and basically, working with diverse teams.

**What Laboratory Technician skills would you recommend for someone trying to advance their career?**

**Daniel Ludwigen:** Graduates from our programs often find that graduate degrees, masters, or even doctorates, fit into their career trajectories well. If I were advising a graduating senior considering a gap year, I would suggest a certificate program in a relevant field, such as programming, data science, or similar areas. While these incorporate broadly applicable skills as well as valuable disciplinary perspective, these certificate programs often offer credit that can later be applied toward a graduate degree.

**What general advice would you give to a Laboratory Technician?**

**Daniel Ludwigen:** If I'm talking with a graduate that is in the fortunate position to be weighing multiple opportunities, I emphasize the importance of work culture. This applies to graduate schools as well! If you are interviewing, and have a chance to evaluate the environment in which you'll be spending so much of your time and energy, try to pick up on the nonverbal "feel" of the place and the people there.

**PATRICK DROHAN PH.D.**

Associate Professor of Pedology  
Pennsylvania State University  
Department of Ecosystem Science and  
Management

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**What are the biggest trends we'll see in the Laboratory Technician job market given the pandemic?**

**Patrick Drohan Ph.D.:** The market will rebound in a way similar to the 1920s following the Spanish Flu pandemic. Coupled with the administration shifts, students in science fields especially will be well-placed for quick hires. There is also an age cohort now moving in retirement that occupied a pretty large percentage of positions and those jobs are opening up to entry-level hires. We are starting to see some of that now.

**What skills stand out on Laboratory Technician resumes?**

**Patrick Drohan Ph.D.:** The academic skills are very important, experience in academic clubs like soil judging or weed judging (your niche), but more important is a diversity of experience with working in labs while in school, having summer jobs tied to your career, etc. - working at Dairy Queen in your home town may

not be the best idea anymore if you are trying to out-compete others for entry-level work, and frankly, there is plenty of work out there if you are willing to move.

### Are there any particularly good places in the United States for Laboratory Technicians to find work opportunities?

**Patrick Drohan Ph.D.:** Depends on what they want to do, are they single, etc. If you are flexible and qualified you can land a job anywhere. If you are social, then moving to remote parts of Alaska might not be the best idea. If you are looking for a niche, having relative experience prior to applying will be important. There are lots of qualified candidates today who have impressive entry-level resumes. Women tend to be more qualified than men too.

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#### **DR. TANEA REED PH.D.**

Chair, Professor  
Eastern Kentucky University  
Department of Chemistry

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### What are the biggest trends we'll see in the Laboratory Technician job market given the pandemic?

**Dr. Tanea Reed Ph.D.:** Although employment in the chemical and pharmaceutical manufacturing sectors are trending downward due to the current pandemic, the job outlook for chemists is promising. As there is high demand for laboratory technician positions to analyze COVID-19 samples using classical laboratory techniques. Many jobs are available for those with bachelor's and master's level degrees. Additionally, the need for those studying chemistry to work on potential treatments for the virus including other vaccines is great.

### What Laboratory Technician skills would you recommend for someone trying to advance their career?

**Dr. Tanea Reed Ph.D.:** I would recommend gaining additional laboratory and/or research experience to enhance their skill set with new techniques. Individuals could do this by reaching out to principal investigators of research laboratories who are conducting research that they have an interest in. They can also start to build their network by reaching out to professional organizations such as the American Chemical Society and their university's alumni association. These relationships can possibly lead to future opportunities.

### What general advice would you give to a Laboratory Technician?

**Dr. Tanea Reed Ph.D.:** To a graduate just starting out, I would highly recommend establishing a list of short-term and long-term goals. Think about where they see themselves in the next 5 to 10 years and how they plan to reach them using SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). Additionally, if they have not already done so, they should set up a LinkedIn account as many jobs can be found on that platform. New graduates should plan on making multiple resumes that can be used when applying to different jobs based on the criteria (i.e., skills, academic, etc.). Lastly, I would recommend making a list of their "dream jobs and companies" and research the skills needed to perform the duties of their dream job and learn more about the company itself.



#### **DR. RAINER GLASER**

Professor and Chair  
Missouri University of Science and Technology  
Chemistry Department

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## What are the biggest trends we'll see in the Laboratory Technician job market given the pandemic?

**Dr. Rainer Glaser:** Steady demand for chemistry graduates at all levels of employment in industry and government. There has been a steady increase in the demand for chemists with expertise in instrumental trace analysis, and the pandemic accelerates the trend. On the academic ladder, everything slowed down to a crawl. Doctoral students need and take more time to graduate. Postdoctoral positions are harder to find. There are hardly any openings for faculty positions.

## What skills stand out on Laboratory Technician resumes?

**Dr. Rainer Glaser:** Chemistry competence is key, of course. As a close second, chemists need to demonstrate effective team player competence. Communication skills are essential, in conversation and in writing. Effective collaboration requires highly developed skills to work with team members, peers, and leadership.

## Are there any particularly good places in the United States for Laboratory Technicians to find work opportunities?

**Dr. Rainer Glaser:** There are a few classic hubs of "big commodities chemistry" and "big pharma", for example. Interestingly, the chemistry enterprise constantly spawns new specializations and keeps getting more de-centralized with excellent employment opportunities in every state.



### **DR. BRUCE HUCKELL PH.D.**

Associate Professor  
University of New Mexico  
Department of Anthropology

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## Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Laboratory Technicians?

**Dr. Bruce Huckell Ph.D.:** Yes, to some degree. For graduate students, the restrictions on travel and out-of-state research, as well as the closures of museums, all act to extend the length of time it will take to obtain their master's or doctoral degrees. For undergraduates, the limitations on in-person instruction may compromise the training in laboratory class settings; students may not learn as much if hands-on training is reduced or eliminated.

## What type of skills will young Laboratory Technicians need?

**Dr. Bruce Huckell Ph.D.:** While the kinds of skills necessary for success aren't likely to change, how people learn those skills may shift to some extent from academic institutions to employers, again due to the pandemic.

## What experience really stands out on Laboratory Technician resumes?

**Dr. Bruce Huckell Ph.D.:** In terms of archaeology, for employers in the governmental and private sectors, I think experience in field work and laboratory analysis is what is most desired when considering folks with bachelor's degrees. In those same employment settings, master's and doctoral graduates who have good writing skills need the knowledge of appropriate legal regulations and museum methods and the ability to organize and supervise workers. In the academic realm, where a doctoral degree is needed in most instances, skills in research, teaching, and public/professional service are the key realms in which experience must stand out.



### **CHRISTOPHER BAE PH.D.**

Professor, Department Chair  
University of Hawaii at Manoa

### Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Laboratory Technicians?

**Christopher Bae Ph.D.:** Yes and no. Obviously, hiring in anthropology, like most academic fields, has become more difficult now because of the economic impact of COVID-19 worldwide. However, anthropology graduates are still managing to find job placement in postdoctoral research fellowships, cultural resource management firms, and non-governmental organizations. The applied areas of anthropology are where positions can still be found fairly regularly. Moving forward, however, I anticipate a rebound, like in most fields, of hires more broadly in anthropology.

### What type of skills will young Laboratory Technicians need?

**Christopher Bae Ph.D.:** Several things really make a resume stand out when hitting the job market. First and foremost, experience in the field and/or laboratory and the ability to show that one is capable of starting a project from scratch and seeing it through to final completion (as evidenced from resulting conference presentations and publications). Undergraduate students should try to gain experience as interns and in field schools. This gives them some experience, and they get a chance to see whether the field is right for them. Graduate students need to develop advanced analytical skills as they work through their qualitative and quantitative datasets. Having a high grade point average can help as well if the hiring firm requests academic transcripts.

### What experience really stands out on Laboratory Technician resumes?

**Christopher Bae Ph.D.:** Field and laboratory experience, particularly involvement with projects that lead to eventual publications. Internships and field schools are great ways to get one's feet wet, so to speak.

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**B**

#### **BENJAMIN FORD**

Professor and Chair  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Department of Anthropology

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### What are the biggest trends we'll see in the Laboratory Technician job market given the pandemic?

**Benjamin Ford:** The pandemic has laid bare many of the inequities in American societies. Suddenly many more citizens are 'woke'. As a discipline that has always excelled at critically analyzing human systems, Anthropology is well positioned to help Americans work in this new landscape. This will translate into more jobs for people with anthropological training. For example, the hospital systems will benefit from employing global health practitioners who have a broad view of healthcare and who are well versed in how to navigate health disparities. The infrastructure projects that will likely begin as the nation gets back on its feet will also need trained archaeologists to complete the cultural resource management requirements.

### What Laboratory Technician skills would you recommend for someone trying to advance their career?

**Benjamin Ford:** Students taking a gap year should think about where they want to end up, both geographically and in terms of a career, and position themselves accordingly. That might mean moving to where they eventually want to live, taking a job to pay the bills, and volunteering with an organization to build local contacts. They should also work to develop the skills that will make them necessary in their intended career. The world became much more digital in the last nine months. We will likely return to many of our pre-pandemic physical practices, but aspects of our remote-everything existence will likely stick with us. Developing skills to be successful in a digital environment will be important.

### What general advice would you give to a Laboratory Technician?

**Benjamin Ford:** Students graduating this year have come through a life-changing year. I'd encourage them to embrace that change. Rather than putting this year behind them and moving on, I'd like graduates to reflect on what worked and didn't work in the past year, and use that reflection to improve themselves and the world. This could be as simple as continuing to hone the time management skills we were all forced to develop, or as large as working to dismantle one of the structural inequalities that became glaringly apparent as nations struggled with health and economy.

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### **DR. ALEXANDRA GORGEVSKA PH.D.**

Department Chair  
Palm Beach State College  
Biotechnology Program  
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#### **Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Laboratory Technicians?**

**Dr. Alexandra Gorgevska Ph.D.:** Only time will tell. However, I feel that this pandemic has brought our students' and alumni's resilience and adaptability to the forefront. With most laboratories limiting the number of employees present, most are not taking on in-person interns at this time. However, they are working with our program to provide remote experiences for our students and provide invaluable support.

Our students have taken time to listen and research the science, found ways to overcome the adversities that have come their way and continue to have a positive outlook. The students in our program are following social distancing guidelines and adapting to the changing learning environments. I believe their resilience and resolve will only add to their successes in life and make them better scientists for it.

#### **What type of skills will young Laboratory Technicians need?**

**Dr. Alexandra Gorgevska Ph.D.:** Graduates [of all ages] will continue to need hands-on skills, the ability to work both in the group and individual settings, and, most importantly, be curious and teachable. Soft skills have taken on greater importance over the years, so we provide ongoing events for outreach, scientific communication, interview preparation, etc., to help provide students with ways to improve and grow their soft skills.

We are seeing scientific communications transitioning from in-person to remote settings, and our students are excelling at rising to the challenges. South Florida has a diverse life science career field, and our students continue to be well prepared to enter the job market and succeed in their career paths.

#### **What experience really stands out on Laboratory Technician resumes?**

**Dr. Alexandra Gorgevska Ph.D.:** The Palm Beach State College Biotechnology Program is a very hands-on intensive training program that ensures our graduates are well versed in fundamental life science laboratory techniques and sterile/aseptic techniques and instrumentation skills. As part of our program, students can earn two College Credit Certificates along with an A.S. degree that includes an industry internship experience.

We are very fortunate to have an excellent relationship with our business partners who are familiar with our facilities, worked with us for many years, and are aware of the vast instrumentation and hands-on training our students receive. They continue to provide career opportunities for our students and interns.

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### **JOHN WILBUR PH.D.**

Associate Professor of Practice  
University of Arizona  
Animal and Comparative Biomedical Sciences  
Department

### Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Laboratory Technicians?

John Wilbur Ph.D.: I am not sure we can tell at this time how the pandemic will impact graduates. I am sure the job market is bleak, at best.

### What type of skills will young Laboratory Technicians need?

John Wilbur Ph.D.: In the short-term, testing skills like PCR and ELISA seems essential, but I think the enduring skills or working with a team, writing, and other communication skills are most important.

### What experience really stands out on Laboratory Technician resumes?

John Wilbur Ph.D.: Working in a research lab on a project is perhaps the most critical resume gem, but any work experience where you needed to coordinate with a team to complete tasks is something I would push forward. Specific skills are transient, but things like working with a group, finishing on deadlines, and communicating are things that stand out.



#### **GLEN P. MILLER**

Professor & Chair of Chemistry  
The University of New Hampshire's Central  
Science  
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### What experience really stands out on Laboratory Technician resumes?

Glen P. Miller: Research experiences stand out on a resume, especially those leading to scientific publication in peer-reviewed journals or professional presentations (either poster or oral) at scientific meetings. Internships and/or previous employment in the field also stand out.

### How do you envision technology impacting Laboratory Technicians in the next 5 years?

Glen P. Miller: The chemistry field is constantly impacted by advancements in scientific instrumentation, hardware, and software, especially those that cut across adjacent fields like biology and materials science. Job seekers should be well-grounded in current technologies while aware of recent developments and trends.

### Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Laboratory Technicians?

Glen P. Miller: Yes, there will be many enduring impacts. Office spaces and buildings will be devalued somewhat, while remote work and virtual meetings have become and will remain important. In chemistry and tangential fields, there will always be a need for in-person work in specialized laboratories, but the manner in which we communicate results internally and externally has changed. There will be less emphasis on in-person communication and a greater emphasis on remote and electronic communication, including email and video reports/presentations. Business travel will drop while skills that enable effective electronic communication will play an even larger role than they already do. Writing skills, including but not limited to technical writing, will become an increasingly valued characteristic of top employees. An ability to speak in a clear, articulate manner will also be prized. None of this, however, supersedes the need for graduates with a robust background in chemistry and a strong work ethic to match.

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### **MOHAMMAD SAADEH PH.D.**

Department Head  
Southeastern Louisiana University  
Department of Industrial and Engineering  
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#### **What are the biggest trends we'll see in the Laboratory Technician job market given the pandemic?**

**Mohammad Saadeh Ph.D.:** People who communicate effectively, knowledge of web-based applications. I was writing technical reports and the ability to shift attention and re-adjust as quickly as possible.

#### **What technology do you think will become more important and prevalent for Laboratory Technicians in the next 3-5 years?**

**Mohammad Saadeh Ph.D.:** IoT and automation.

#### **Will there be an increase or decrease in demand for Laboratory Technicians in the next 5 years?**

**Mohammad Saadeh Ph.D.:** There will be an increase; however, employers will be looking for a unique set of qualities/abilities. Some of the trends have been: technical writing, sales, communication, besides the technical skills, which must be current with the evolution in communication methods that we are experiencing.



### **GERALD BERGTROM PH.D.**

Professor of Biological Sciences (Emeritus) & Teaching & Learning Consultant  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Biological Sciences Department

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#### **What experience really stands out on Laboratory Technician resumes?**

**Gerald Bergtrom Ph.D.:** -A strong academic record, especially in the sciences.  
-For any applicant, a research experience with a faculty or private-sector mentor is always a stand-out. Whether or not for academic credit, a valuable experience does not require that research efforts be successful. However, it will be supported by listing the mentor among the job applicant's academic references.  
-The applicant should provide a written description of any independent research (laboratory or other) to be appended to the job application and cover letter. This document should communicate a clear understanding of the project and their role in it. I used to have my undergrad independent study researchers talk about their projects at weekly lab meetings. By the time they were looking for a job (or, for that matter, applying to grad school), I wanted these students to be able to articulate hypotheses being tested, to show how their experimental design would test predictions of alternative results, and finally to discuss their progress and any results obtained from their piece of the project. The ability to write clearly about their independent study goals and experience will reflect communication skills, a measure of scientific understanding, and their enthusiasm and pleasure of "doing science."  
-Extracurricular activities that include collaborative work (team sports are suitable for this).  
-Extracurricular volunteer activities that expose students to social situations outside of family, friends, and classmates. An ability to write about these experiences engagingly is always a stand-out asset.

#### **What Laboratory Technician skills would you recommend for someone trying to advance their career?**

**Gerald Bergtrom Ph.D.:** The answers here depend on why the gap year is needed. If the need is to have an income, this would need to be balanced against other desirable needs and wishes.  
- Thinking about a whole gap year, the student should make a long-term commitment to skills improvement and fill in gaps in a resume or job application.  
-If the new graduate can afford it, spend some time traveling, to be exposed to



different cultures and languages. If the student lives in an area with a growing LatinX population, learning some Spanish would be useful.

-If it looks like the gap year will not include activities related to the job they hope to get at the end of the year, then take at least one STEM course in their area of interest so as not to lose their edge. This could be an online course (for example, a MOOC). Do it for credit if necessary, to prove (to themselves and others) that they still love and want to succeed in science.

### What technology do you think will become more important and prevalent for Laboratory Technicians in the next 3-5 years?

Gerald Bergtrom Ph.D.: -In any STEM field, predicting, recognizing, and fighting climate change looms large. In the life sciences, detecting the effects of environmental change at the species, individual, cellular, and molecular level will be increasingly necessary.

-Medical science will need to respond to new challenges arising out of climate change and the aging population. Supported (as always) by basic sciences, medical science will focus on big-picture biology, represented by the ever-growing number of "...omics". These include genomics, proteomics, transcriptomics, metabolomics... and the enabling technologies that let us look at a lot of genes, gene products, and biochemical reactions at the same time. Finally, the ever-improving gene-editing technologies can lead to the treatment of disease, leading to a greater understanding of the disease and biological process in general.

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