



Communiqué

Fall 2005

The Communication Co-op
Newsletter

It Could Happen to You...

► How a great company sought me out - based on my co-op work experiences!

By Jeanette Leblanc

The thought of completing my degree is often a terrifying feeling. Like most students, I would constantly ask myself “what am I going to do when I graduate!?” After completing three amazing work terms, combined with recent interview experience, I can safely say that I do not have that terrifying thought anymore—with a BIG thanks to co-op.

Job hunting has become instinctual after progressing through the Communication Co-op program, where my resumes and tailored cover letters were edited, re-written, and re-designed so many times I cannot describe what my originals looked like! After learning how to attractively display my skills and effectively use accomplishment statements, I am more confident in my resume than ever before; likewise with my interview skills and portfolio. These experiences, including interview rejections, all helped me through a recent interview where my co-op efforts were put to the test.

In March of this year, I posted my resume online at Workopolis.com. I checked back a few times thereafter but was not seeing results. Time passed and I forgot about my online account. Fast forward to one day in July, when I opened my email to find an employer inviting me to contact them regarding an attached Marketing Coordinator job description.



Communication Co-op student Jeanette Leblanc is currently working as an Area Marketing Coordinator/Assistant at Investors' Group in Vancouver.

At first, I skimmed through the attachment thinking the company was not for me. My friends and co-op coordinator advised me to follow-up anyway, because I had nothing to lose in asking - so I did.

I then tailored my portfolio to the job description, ensuring my best marketing material was up front. Next thing I knew, I had arranged an interview and soon learned this was a really cool job for me. During my follow-up conversation, I learned that my resume stood out to this employer specifically because of one of my co-op work experiences - a very motivating feeling!

I sent them an updated resume and began to prepare for the interview. I researched their company website for hours to learn about current marketing and community relations programs; since this wasn't co-op, I had no work reports to read! I also asked everyone I knew about the company including friends, former colleagues, co-op coordinators, and even my former co-op employers. I reviewed the job description several times and mapped out how my experience fit in.

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Communiqué is a newsletter published every semester by SFU Communication Co-op students. Check us out online at www.sfu.ca/communique

International Experiences Give Students a Leading Edge

► How an international workterm gave me the confidence to tackle my fears.

By Dennis Chang

Decisions:

It was the summer of 2004, and I was sitting in the lecture hall of C9001 wondering if I should take the opportunity to travel half way around the world to complete my first co-op term. Little did I know that I would be granted an extension with *The China Post* for a second co-op term, in addition to getting a chance of a lifetime to cover pressing news from Malaysia.

Indeed, I was worried and had eerie feelings of being away from my family and friends. However, my gut instincts proved me right, and looking back now, taking this opportunity was definitely a life-changing experience I will never forget.

Shock:

Everything was not smooth sailing as most would expect. Coming from the best country in world, where clean air and water is plentiful, living and working in Asia was definitely a challenge. For example, when I first arrived in Taiwan, the idea of culture shock never really crossed my mind. But, after a month of the thrills of both meeting new people and seeing new places, I became undeniably home sick. I felt extremely pressed for space and personal freedom, having had to work six days a week, in addition to being ill - I felt psychologically and emotionally worn out.

Adjustment:

Despite those setbacks, I pressed on, and told myself to stay focused on why I was there. Eventually, my persistence and my ability to stay open to learning new skills from my colleagues paid off.

I forged friendships with people from almost every department within the organization and found myself well-liked because of my distinct background, making my daily work much more enjoyable.

The most difficult but important aspects of my job were both learning a new set of interpersonal communication skills and understanding where I fit in with the newspaper entity. I was confronted head-on when, having no prior professional writing experience, the managing editor assigned me to fill in at the business desk on my fifth day of work as a reporter! At first, everything was a mess. I couldn't write or convey myself in both Mandarin and English properly when I was out on press meetings, and often stayed late to finish up ridiculously short articles. Gradually, I grasped the techniques of networking with professionals from all industries and developed a unique and distinctive sense of writing.



Communication Co-op Student Dennis Chang (far left) with a Taiwan Media Excursion group in Borneo Malaysia, soon after the December 26th tsunami.

Acceptance:

Seeing that I was a quick learner, I became the 'sixth man' of the editorial department, writing articles not only in the business department but that of the local art, technology and the travel sections.

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► **International Experiences...**Continued from Page 2

This was where I got lucky with a trip to Malaysia, when a senior staff member called in sick and the company was panicking for a replacement!



Communication Co-op Student Dennis Chang (centre left), surrounded by the staff of The China Post.

I received tremendous support and was exposed to a wide variety of people in my department and the organization. From creative photography skills I gained from a fellow Canuck, to writing effective lead sentences in headline articles, the senior staff was extremely patient and gave great leeway for my development. I truly feel grateful and honoured to have worked for *The China Post* as I was not treated like an intern, but as part of the permanent staff.

This co-op term gave me the inner strength to confront my fears and gain the confidence to tackle obstacles I never thought I could achieve prior to this co-op experience. But most of all, it allowed me to apply my knowledge and the skills I learned from school to the workplace. I encourage all students to try international self-directed co-op work terms.

Tips for Self-Directed Work Search:

When searching for international co-op opportunities, look into the local papers of your desired destination and ask yourself what you can give employers that they cannot find in their local market.

Also, when looking for jobs, never discard the ones that do not fit your perfect criteria. After all, “good things never come in perfect packages”, says Rocky Young, President of the leading Human Resource agency Job Bank 104 in Taiwan. Always emphasize the positive aspects of hiring a co-op student. ◀

► **It Could Happen to You...**Continued from Page 1

Feeling more than prepared, I arrived an hour early to find the building, and then found a neighboring coffee shop to read over my notes and relax. The interview lasted 75 minutes but felt like 10 – the conversation flew by!

I referenced their website and discussed some of their online programs, which impressed the interviewer. I also drew from my own experiences and referenced my portfolio to highlight why I was the one for the job. I shook the interviewer’s hand and thanked him for his time, and walked out of the interview room feeling like a million bucks.

This was the best interview experience I have had yet, and I reiterated my appreciation in the thank you card mailed out that same day. All my preparation had paid off!

It is flattering to have a large company pursue you for your work experience, and co-op work experience at that. I was offered the job shortly thereafter, and of course, I accepted. ◀

“ I learned that my resume stood out to this employer specifically because of my co-op work experiences - a very motivating feeling! ”

Top Co-op Employer: Knowledge Network

► Not-for-profit co-op employer helps students gain needed experience.

By Raman Bhangu

Knowledge Network is British Columbia's only public broadcaster delivering high quality, credible and accessible programming to educate and inform communities through television and the web, providing the information British Columbians need to adapt to their changing world. So when I was first told about my interview with Knowledge Network, I was very intimidated. After all, I had only completed one co-op term and had done very little communication-related volunteer work. Did I have the skills and ability to contribute to the education of British Columbians with a provincial broadcaster that has been on air for almost 25 years?

I was very surprised and excited when they offered me the position of Communications Assistant. Knowledge Network offered me a challenge and I have only benefited from this extraordinary experience. I was given opportunities to develop, learn and achieve skills that I never thought I could possess at such an early stage. From writing press releases to editing my own on-air promotional piece for National Geographic, plus much more, Knowledge Network is the stepping stone that has broadened the range of my transferable skills.

Working for a creative and education-based organization has shown how valuable a public broadcaster is to this consumer-saturated society. As the Communications Assistant, I was given a chance to contact British Columbians who support Knowledge Network. During this interactive experience, I saw and understood first-hand what a difference this broadcaster makes in the lives of most people, especially busy parents. Parents are often unable to monitor their children at every moment, so they turn on Knowledge Network because they know that it is a non-violent and commercial-free television station.



Communication Co-op student Raman Bhangu with Knowledge Network promotional items.

Knowledge Network makes important contributions to the growing independent producers' community in British Columbia and the rest of Canada. Its financial support, expertise in content development, and wide BC reach help up-and-coming producers create thought-provoking films. Independent productions such as the critically acclaimed *The Corporation*, and Oscar-nominated *Hardwood* are just a few productions that were made possible through aid from Knowledge Network.

Knowledge Network aims to help British Columbians adjust to their changing world and support a creative and growing independent producers' community. It goes above and beyond just broadcasting shows to BC communities by taking an active role in the development of our communities. By becoming a part of Simon Fraser University's co-op program and giving opportunities to students like me, it is only strengthening its ties to education and learning, while providing us with real-world skills. ◀

Meet the Faculty: Dr. Roman Onufrijchuk

► SFU School of Communication prof mirrors the principles on which co-op is based.

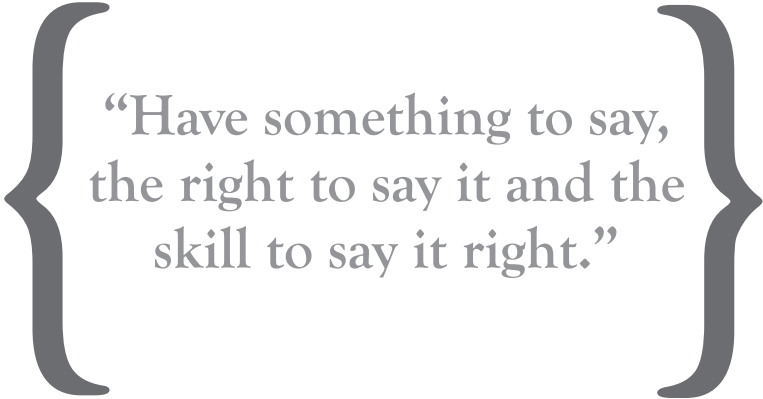
By Sharon Roberts

“Have something to say, the right to say it, and the skill to say it right.” Any student who has taken a class with Dr. Roman Onufrijchuk has probably heard this statement at one time. Roman, as he is known by his students, is a lecturer in the School of Communication, and throughout his life has mirrored the principles on which co-op is based: alternating career with scholarship. On a drizzling day in April, I had the chance to chat with Roman about what his statement means in terms of a university education and how it transfers over into the workplace.

Almost everybody has an opinion about something, so how does it end up that we hear some opinions and not others? Roman looks to the pragmatics of oratory and rhetoric to provide the answer. Throughout our university careers, countless hours are spent researching numerous topics. By being familiar with the opinions and research of those who have come before us, we gain the right to express our own opinions. By supporting a stance with other scholarly evidence, and maybe even more importantly, recognizing contrary opinions and being able to account for the discrepancy, we are justified in expressing our opinions.

The last piece of the puzzle is having the skill to say something “right.” “Communicating begins and ends with writing,” says Roman, and there are many media through which we can communicate, in a variety of formats, for many different audiences. Learning to identify an audience, format your message appropriately, and deliver it effectively, are universal skills that serve us well in university, and are essential in any career. By having something to say, gaining the right to say it, and honing the skill to say it right, students figure out what they need to do to make things happen.

Beyond effective communication, Roman sees many other parallels between scholarship and career: university life is not that different from the real world. “Rules are rules, expectations are expectations and deadlines are deadlines; although we may have a warped sense of time at university, the principles are the same.” At university, students learn to be articulate, to listen effectively, and to reflectively evaluate. It is learning how to use the knowledge that you have and more specifically, realize the limits to that knowledge. Co-op gives students the opportunity to figure out the relationship between the use of these skills in study and in a career.



“Have something to say,
the right to say it and the
skill to say it right.”

By bringing a “wow we have finally grown up” element to education, co-op helps students test the waters in the “real world” without jumping in with both feet. In closing, Roman quoted Harold M. Innis in saying the “purpose of education is to prepare you to be against your occupation, not for it” and if nothing else, co-op helps students to figure out what they don’t want to do, although most glean much more from the program, returning to their studies with a new-found sense of purpose. ◀

Where Are They Now?

► Continued success for Communication Co-op record-holder.

By Jaskiran Uppal and Keiko Cooper

After completing an Honours Degree in Communication with a co-op designation at SFU, Curtis Johnston extended his extensive co-op experience at Western Economic Diversification (WED) Canada into a full-time position. Curtis decided to join the co-op program after he heard a co-op presentation in one of his Communication classes.

“[The speakers] highlighted the various benefits of working for different entities in order to gain job experience. It also seemed like the next best step to get job experience since I was almost half way through my degree and I didn’t know what I could do with Communication,” said Curtis of his reasons for joining co-op.



Communication Co-op alumnus Curtis Johnson looks forward to continuing his career as a Business Officer at Western Economic Diversification Canada.

Curtis is currently working as a Business Officer at WED Canada. “I assess and implement community and economic development programs and services for the Rural Sustainable Communities Unit. This role allows me to develop and sustain collaborative working relationships with stakeholders,” he said of his current role at WED Canada.

Curtis holds SFU Communication Co-op’s record of completing the most work terms: eight. His first work term was at PMC-Sierra Inc., as a Marketing Communication Assistant. He says that his “...duties consisted of assisting with the organization of a conference, maintaining the Intranet site, and media monitoring.”

His second co-op work term was at BC Hydro as a Summer Student, and Curtis’s duties consisted of writing articles and press releases for an internal newsletter, answering public inquiries and organizing events. As a third work term at Spectrum Signal Processing, he had the role of Marketing Communications Assistant. It was there where he developed and maintained a media coverage system and designed an Intranet site.

Curtis’s fourth work term was at BC Hydro in Environmental Regulatory Relations within their Corporate Sustainability Group, where he was responsible for conducting research and maintaining content for their Intranet site. His last four workterms were with his current employer, WED Canada as a Policy Analyst.

Curtis became interested in working for WED Canada after a friend encouraged him to apply for a co-op position there. In addition to an extremely high level of responsibility, he added a lot of value to WED Canada that seemed to extend beyond his co-op responsibilities. “I had worked at BC Hydro and had knowledge of the renewable energy sector. I was also completing an honours report on that sector with my Hydro contacts. This was an emerging field for new economic development in BC, so I was given the portfolio at WED Canada.” Curtis was able to integrate his academic knowledge and therefore previous co-op experiences to his chosen workplace.

When asked for advice he would pass along to up-and-coming Communication students, Curtis had this to say: “Co-op is there for students to gain a wide variety of work experience that is related to their careers. It may even offer them something they didn’t consider before. Get out and volunteer and continuously seek to build your resume. It will have huge benefits after you graduate!” ◀

The Perfect Portfolio

► Stand out from the crowd with an eye-catching portfolio.

By Keiko Cooper

We spend hours upon hours practicing for our co-op job interviews, going over questions with our coordinators and student advisors and practicing our delivery of answers with confidence, so that we can dazzle an interviewer with our verbal wit. But is there anything else we could be doing to stand out from our competition? Is there a “next step” that we could take to make it even easier for the interviewer to choose us over everyone else?

Well, in addition to doing research about the company and job role, as well as preparing great answers, portfolios of work and achievements are becoming an increasingly important part of the interview process. We all know that providing examples of past experiences when answering interview questions is a great way to “paint the picture” for an interviewer, but just imagine how much clearer and detailed that picture would be if we used concrete examples, pulled directly from our portfolio right there on the spot.

“But what if I have never done a work term?” you ask. Not to worry, as your coordinators have probably told you, think of yourself not as a job title (e.g. “student”), but as a “portable” skill set. Many of the skills and experiences you have accumulated up to this point are most likely from in-class work and are certainly transferable to an on-the-job situation. Pull your best projects and assignments to highlight in your portfolio. Have you taken CMNS 200? If so, include the press releases and backgrounders you wrote. What about CMNS 375? Include the layout and design or the advertising market analysis you completed.

At this point you might be thinking about creating your own portfolio and wondering about how best to highlight your achievements. There are several different ways to show employers that you have the skills and experience to succeed on the job and the following are just two methods that you might want to consider:

Print Portfolio:

- 1) Gather all your printed documents including originals of brochures, writing samples, design work, reports or other relevant pieces.
- 2) Decide on an organized and functional way to display your documents. Some options include three-ring binders with tabs, or for larger printed items, an artist’s portfolio book might be a better option.
- 3) Be sure to include small descriptions alongside each printed original. This helps to give context to when, why and how you completed the work.



When assembling your portfolio, solicit opinions and feedback whenever you can from your coordinators, student advisors, professionals in the field and/or your peers.

Electronic Portfolio:

- 1) Gather all electronic versions of your documents and be sure that they are in a universally readable file format (e.g. PDF).
- 2) Create a “blueprint” of the information or artifacts you will include on your website and how these pieces will be organized (e.g. resume, work experience, projects, technical skills, contact information).
- 3) Create a website that reflects you and upload your documents. Be sure to review it and make sure all your links work properly by having a friend test them as well.
- 4) Be sure to promote your website when networking with others by including a link on your resume, business cards or e-mail signature.

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Student Communicator of the Year

By Keiko Cooper

The International Association of Business Communicators BC Chapter (IABC/BC), has chosen their “Student Communicator of the Year” and it is none other than SFU Communication Co-op student Jessica Hume! Along with recognition from the IABC community, Jessica also received \$1,000 from sponsor Coast Capital Savings.

Jessica submitted the communication plan she completed on a co-op work term at the Occupational Health and Safety Agency for Healthcare in BC (OHSAH). Jessica designed and marketed an online newsletter called “Health & Safety Update”, to disseminate news on OHSAH’s projects, encourage the use of OHSAH resources, and increase the awareness of occupational health and safety issues among healthcare workers.

Communication professionals Clare Marwick (Communication Program Manager at ICBC) and Gary Carr (Communications Consultant) judged Jessica’s submission to be the winner because it was well organized and researched. Indeed, Jessica’s communication plan achieved the goals she had set including: increasing the subscription rate by 15% over six months, achieving over 50% views through e-mail and producing a newsletter that over 75% of subscribers deem “very useful.”

What advice does Jessica have for students thinking of submitting a communication plan next year? “The best advice would be to just give it a shot... It may take a bit of time to put together the communication plan but it is a worthwhile experience that anyone looking to get into the communication industry can learn from. And even if you don’t win you’ll have that experience behind you and you’ll have a communication plan for your portfolio!”

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Statistics Corner

Who we are	05-2	04-2
New admits	54	43
Returning students	71	78
Total students enrolled	125	121

Who’s doing what		
Eight-month term	27	23
First co-op	41	30
Second co-op	24	18
Third co-op	32	18
Fourth co-op	7	19
Fifth co-op	1	7
Part-time co-op	-	-
Self-directed co-op	16	-
Total Placements	106	91

Where we’re working		
Greater Vancouver	91	73
Out-of-town	9	11
Overseas	6	7

Who we’re working for		
Federal government	22	13
Provincial government	4	2
Municipal government	1	1
Government agencies	14	13
Not-for-profit	32	21
Private Sector	33	41

► **The Perfect Portfolio...Continued from Page 7**

Of course, these steps are only a brief outline of how you can get started on creating your own perfect portfolio. As with your resume, your portfolio is a constantly evolving tool that will change each time you finish a class, work term or volunteer activity and come away with another great piece to add to your “portable skill set.”

A Print Portfolio Workshop and Electronic Portfolio Workshop are offered free to co-op students. Visit the online Co-op Community (www.coopcommunity.sfu.ca) for dates, times and registration information. ◀