

# Communi*qué*

Summer 2005

The Communication Co-op  
Newsletter

## Work Experience Can Get You Ahead of the Game

► Why Communication Co-op was the right choice for me

By Julia Spitale

When I signed up for the Communication Co-op program in the fall, I wondered whether or not I made the right decision. The last thing I wanted to do was add another year or so to finish my degree. The question plaguing my mind was, would co-op be worth it?

Now, having completed my first work term at the BC Lions Football Club, I realize how priceless work experience is to a student. However, I am not exactly suggesting that we all start burning our books and start looking for jobs! While education can be a great foundation for a successful career, work experience is the building block that will get you closer to your career goals.

As a Community Relations Intern at the BC Lions, my position consisted of several responsibilities, such as event planning, handling all donation requests from charities, as well as answering the general inquires from the public. For any community event that the players were a part of, it was my job to make sure their attendance was a success and since my internship was during the off-season for the Lions, player appearances were numerous. Also, one of my main responsibilities was planning and managing the BC Lions' community programs. One such program, called "Lions in the House", was geared towards high school students with the purpose of teaching them about social responsibility. Along with BC Lions players, I visited 25 high schools in three months all across the Lower Mainland.



L-R BC Lions Director of Community Relations Lui Passaglia, BC Lions President & CEO Bob Ackles and Communication Co-op student Julia Spitale.

As you can tell, I dealt with the players quite often. I must admit I had a preconceived notion of what working with football players would be like; however, I was too quick to judge. The players that I dealt with were easy-going, well-educated, always up for a laugh and generally all-around good guys. Since I did not watch football, I didn't know who any of these guys were. Casey Printers, Geroy Simon, Duncan O'Mahony, Javier Glatt - all were new names and faces to me. It was only when I was out in the community with them that I started to realize they are well-recognized sport stars. It was especially interesting to see the reaction from the female community towards the players, particularly the girls at the high schools. I just hope I wasn't like that when I was that age, although I hate to admit that I probably was!

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# Big Brothers of Greater Vancouver Foundation: Top Co-op Employer

## ► Bowling towards a great cause

By Katie Laughlin

“Hi, my name is Katie, an events assistant with Big Brothers, and your host for this evening. I’d like to welcome everyone to the 2005 Bowl for Big Brothers Classic!”

Every year, during February and March, the Big Brothers of Greater Vancouver Foundation encourages companies to collect pledges in order to raise funds for the various mentoring programs that Big Brothers offers. This is their largest annual event, which this year raised a record \$620,000. Over 4000 bowlers from over 320 companies participated at 86 events and I got to be a part of every minute!

In addition to their Big and Little matches, where the “Big” brothers are matched with their “Little” brothers, Big Brothers offers four other programs which match boys and girls with adult and teen volunteers for weekly activities. These programs include the “In-School Mentoring Program”, the “Teen Mentoring Program”, the “Let’s Be Friends Program” and the “Big Brunch Program”

It is easy to see why Big Brothers is such a great organization to work for. They have hired many co-op students in the past, but since 1999, Sharon McLeod, Manager of Fund Development and SFU Communication Co-op alumnus, has hired 13 Co-op students. “Co-op students not only decrease the overtime hours of permanent staff, but they allow us to increase the number of companies and bowlers we can accommodate during our campaign. They also provide new energy to the campaign every year”, says McLeod.

Another returning co-op alumnus is Events Coordinator Christine Reid. “My experience with Co-operative Education perfectly demonstrates the benefits of the program. I joined Big Brothers of Greater Vancouver as a co-op student and returned to the organization following the completion of my degree.

I now have the opportunity to work with other co-op students and ensure that they receive the same positive experience as I did”, says Reid.

And what a positive and fun experience it was. I, along with two other SFU Co-op students, was responsible for organizing and staging bowling events throughout February and March at lanes throughout the Lower Mainland. I got to experience a wide variety of jobs such as coordinating the volunteers, greeting bowlers, overseeing pledge book collection



L-R Big Brothers of Greater Vancouver Foundation Manager of Fund Development Sharon McLeod, Communication Co-op students Katie Laughlin and Events Coordinator Christine Reid.

My fellow co-op student, Amanda Brkich, shares my feelings that “it was very rewarding to wake up each morning and come to the office knowing that I was working towards a great cause. Not only did I learn about all the minute details it takes to put together a large-scale fundraiser, but I was also privileged to work with a great group of supportive individuals who make the workplace a fun and comfortable environment.” After a long day at the office and a full night of bowling events, we were never tired because of the smiles on the faces of the bowlers and staff from knowing that we had made a contribution to the lives of children in our community. ◀

# An International Perspective

► International students bring fresh ideas to the workplace

By Paschal Ssemaganda

Working in a different country has challenged me in so many ways that it is difficult to know where to begin. When I first started at SFU, I did not intend to do co-op as part of my degree; I simply wanted to complete a degree in Business Administration within three years and return home to Uganda. Four years later, I am a Communication major, a History minor and one course away from a Liberal Arts Certificate. I am also working on my third co-op term with the Bard on the Beach Theatre Company in Vancouver this summer. To simply say “things change” would not only be cliché, it would be an understatement. Adjusting to a new culture will do that.

Like many other countries in Africa, Uganda has been severely devastated by the effects of several years of civil wars. Between 1971 and 1989, the country was governed by three different military regimes, an experience that has left many collective scars on the psyche of the nation. Both the public and private sectors are rife with corruption and constant fears of insecurity. Notions of punctuality are generally lax and authoritarian principles are widely practised in the work force. Likewise, labour unions are unheard of and the “minimum wage” is a pipe dream. I knew that working in Uganda would be very different from working in Canada.

In my case, adjusting to cultural differences and transforming myself into a credible candidate for Canadian co-op positions has been one of the success stories of my undergraduate career. My first two co-op terms were self-directed with the SFU Guest Accommodations office. At the time, I felt that it was important for me to choose an environment in which I would be able to learn basic administrative skills while simultaneously developing specialized communication skills.

During the first term, I served on a team of customer representatives. The position demanded exceptional interpersonal communication skills in order to meet the demands of clients from different parts of the world.

I was also required to learn many new operations at a fast pace, such as operating a credit card machine, a rare technology in Uganda. My greatest challenge though was adjusting to the principles and expectations of a work environment in Canada. I constantly had to remind myself that it was acceptable to make a few mistakes, ask questions and make suggestions. When I finally learnt to make suggestions, I was amazed at my employer’s willingness to implement them. I grew to realize that international students are often an asset in the workplace as their insights into other cultures give an employer the flexibility to offer better service to a multicultural clientele. Having developed the basic skills, I feel more prepared to venture into the industry’s more competitive waters.

From my experience, learning to be a creative and confident contributor in a progressive work environment is an important complement to any degree. Students from developing countries may be discouraged by the lack of previous experience when considering co-op, but the reward is well worth the effort. Through the co-op program, I will graduate with a year’s worth of work experience, contacts in Canada, and the knowledge that I am qualified to work in at least two different countries. ◀

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# What's the Big Deal with Volunteering?

► How volunteering can help you succeed in co-op and beyond

By John Grant

As communication students, we've all been subject to countless lectures highlighting the fact that we do indeed live in a capitalistic society based upon financial success. It seems strange then, that so many people choose to pass up a buck or two in order to help out their community. Volunteering is a huge phenomenon now; I may even be so bold as to say that it's a fad. I recently conducted an online survey for my CMNS 425 class and one of the questions asked students if they volunteer their time for an organization. Out of 290 respondents, 50% stated they did in fact volunteer, with the majority of them devoting between 11-20 hours of their precious time each month.

We all have bills to pay and many of us struggle to make ends meet. In addition, spare time is hard to come by when we're all so busy juggling schedules between school, work, and the ups and downs of our personal lives. So, why do so many of us still volunteer?

The answer is obviously subjective based upon what people are looking to give and receive through their efforts. Having said this, I believe there are at least three general reasons people do and/or should volunteer:

Experience:

As co-op students, we all realize that experience is important. I just wrapped up a co-op term as the Marketing, Communication and Events Coordinator for SFU's Co-op program. During my term, I had a few junior co-op students approach me and ask why they weren't getting any job offers. In some cases, they had experience but weren't showcasing it well on their resumes; however, others simply had very little relevant work experience.

Employers take a gamble when they hire co-op students. They know we are still learning and are bound to make mistakes along the way. They feel reassured, however, if they can see that you have experience with tasks they will be assigning to you – and yes, this includes volunteer work. If you're interested in events management, approach some non-profit organizations or even clubs on campus to see if you can assist with implementing an event. You can even apply to volunteer for large events, such as the Vancouver Sun Run. The majority of organizations won't turn away keen (especially educated) people who are willing to donate a few hours.



You can think of your involvement as a trial period for them to assess your skills and qualities as a future employee or referral.



#### Networking:

We hear it all the time now; “it’s not necessarily what you know, but who you know...” For some of us, this may be disheartening as we invest so much time, money and effort into our studies. It’s important to realize that education is an important piece of the puzzle, but it’s not everything. Through my volunteer experience I have met some of the ‘movers and shakers’ of the event planning industry, had casual conversations with politicians, and gained some contract work when some of my contacts passed on my name. Depending on the organization you volunteer for, you can think of your involvement as a trial period for them to assess your skills and qualities as a future employee or referral. Even if they may not benefit from your skills, your name could be passed on to someone who can! Aside from the professional contacts you make, you also meet many other like-minded individuals and often form friendships that last for years.

#### Altruism:

It may be selfish, but we tend to feel great when we help others. Perhaps it’s the joy we see on their faces when we’ve accomplished a huge task for them, or the fact that we also gain a lot out of these experiences in terms of friends, contacts, and experience. Either way, volunteering is a rewarding experience, which benefits ourselves and organizations alike. ◀

#### Some volunteer and networking resources

##### Canadian Public Relations Society

CPRS Vancouver is a networking and professional development organization serving public relations practitioners in BC.

[www.cprsvancouver.com](http://www.cprsvancouver.com)

##### International Association of Business Communicators

IABC/BC is the local chapter of the premier IABC International network for professionals engaged in strategic organizational communication. IABC offers professional development and networking events.

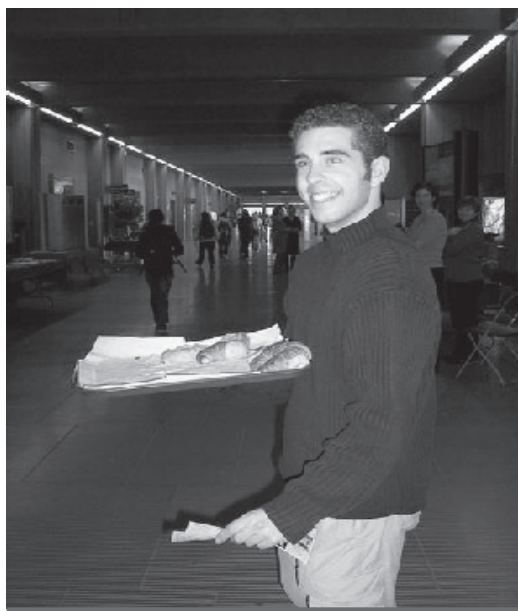
[www.iabc.bc.ca](http://www.iabc.bc.ca)

##### [www.govolunteer.ca](http://www.govolunteer.ca)

This website allows you to search for volunteer activities that suit your interests, skills and schedule.

##### On-campus volunteer opportunities

There are many on-campus resources for willing volunteers. Search “on-campus volunteering” on [www.sfu.ca](http://www.sfu.ca) for a wide range of opportunities or visit the Volunteer Centre.



John Grant volunteered at National Co-op Week 2005

# Where Are They Now?

► The path is “Klear” for alumnus Kristine Berry

By Keiko Cooper

For most people, leaving an established company to start their own business is a very scary thought. But, for Communication co-op alumnus Kristine Berry, it was the next logical step after five co-op work terms and rising through the communication and P.R. ranks at Business Objects, one of the world’s leading software providers.

Kristine’s co-op career...

Kristine held positions with four different organizations throughout her co-op career, starting with the Ministry of Education’s French Programs branch in Victoria, followed by a placement at the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association and then at VISTAS (Vancouver International Strategic Airport Services), a subsidiary of the Airport Authority. For her fourth work term, Kristine was very strategic about which position she accepted – wanting to make sure that she joined a company that had a position open for her after graduation. Kristine eventually accepted an eight-month work term with Seagate Software.



L-R Communication Co-op Alumni Kim Mathewes and Kristine Berry

Rising through the ranks...

Kristine rose through the ranks at Seagate (then at Business Objects) from P.R. Coordinator to P.R. Specialist to P.R. Manager and, finally, to OEM (partner) Marketing Manager. “Working in the high-tech industry was a great way to learn because everything they do is cutting edge and always changing,” said Kristine of her decision to join a software company. “If students pick the right company to start off their career and develop their experience, they can get to amazing places very quickly.” Along with her own ingenuity, Kristine credits the mentorship of some of her managers and Business Objects’ internal promotion philosophy for her professional development.

A “Klear” decision...

So why decide to leave a great company? “I felt like it was the right time in my career to do something on my own and diversify my experience” said Kristine. Over the years and through the acquisitions, Business Objects grew from a 600-person company to a 4000-person company. “It was a really hard decision but if I looked back 10 years from now at my career and saw that I spent five years at Business Objects and five years doing other projects, it would make me a much more well-rounded communication professional.” Kristine partnered with another Business Objects colleague (and Communication Co-op alumnus), Kim Mathewes to form Klear Communication – launched in November of 2004.

Along with the technical expertise she gained from working at Business Objects, Kristine used some important skills and attributes she learned from completing the co-op program in launching Klear Communication and quickly acquiring new clients. “Some of the biggest things I learned from co-op are how to set objectives and measure results, how to position myself and my skills within the organization, how to present my ideas and plans, and how to make an impact on the business,” said Kristine.

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# How to Survive an Ontario Winter

## ► Tips and tricks for a memorable work term in Ontario

By Marika Willms (SFU) and Sasha Badr (UBC)

Both Vancouver-bred, Sasha and I immediately bonded over a shared dislike of extreme temperatures— how ironic then that we had both just accepted eight-month positions with Citizenship and Immigration Canada in Ottawa that would span over the coldest of the winter months. Ottawa, of course, being a city renowned for its bitterly cold climes – with average January “highs” of -6°C – that test the temperature tolerance of the weather-spoiled west coaster.

We were both, admittedly, ill-prepared for an Eastern winter. Though we were gifted with sweaters and lovingly knitted scarves from concerned family before leaving and recounted stories of frozen nose hair, we still did not, could not, be fully prepared for the -35 degree wind chills that were in our future. Now we have experienced them and can share our survival tips so that future Ottawa-bound co-ops can appreciate that, while they are far from fashionable, long johns are decidedly functional.

Marika (SFU co-op)

I vowed to not be one of those “my province is superior” people who constantly compares wherever they are to home. But there I was in December saying (haughtily) “in BC the grass is green right now.” I love Ottawa, make no mistake, but it took some getting used to. My tips: Do not “make do.” Invest in a good pair of gloves and winter boots. Frolic. Find a park (Strathcona is a favourite), build a snowman and slide recklessly down icy hills like you were five years old again. And, finally, embrace the Canadianness of it all. Take comfort in the fact that, once the snow has stopped falling and your fingers regain feeling, you can boast that you are just that bit more Canadian for having survived a “real winter”.

Sasha (UBC co-op)

To someone who has spent most of her life nestled between the North Shore Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, where temperatures remain relatively consistent, the extreme



L-R UBC Co-op student Sasha Badr, Bonhomme and SFU Communication Co-op student Marika Willms

fluctuations that occur in Ottawa were the worst thing to get used to.

We are truly blessed to live in such a temperate climate which, as people from the rest of Canada will love to inform you, is really an anomaly. So how does a BC girl adjust to a new, harsh climate? First of all, whine as much as she can without annoying people to the point where it is ineffective. There is nothing like sympathy (or false sympathy) to make you feel better. Also, prepare for the deteriorating condition of your skin/hair and plan accordingly (moisturize!). Re-learn some basic scientific tenets; at a certain temperature, water molecules will pack closer together and slow their vibrations. This phenomenon, known as “freezing”, is very useful for storing ice cream that does not fit in the freezer. Embrace the ugly – only rich people can afford pretty winter clothes. And lastly, drink copious amounts of hot chocolate and get to know your local video store. When it is 40 below, you don’t have to find an excuse to be lazy.

As Ontarians know, and we have now learned, it is more productive to celebrate winter than to lament about it. Ottawa has a number of winter-friendly activities to draw you out of your self-imposed hibernation. Skate the Rideau Canal. Celebrate Winterlude. Venture to Québec City for Carnival— and pose for a photo op with Bonhomme, down a glass of Caribou, and go “snow rafting” on the Plains of Abraham.

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› *Work Experience....continued from Page 1*

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Working in the large office of a sports team was a brand new experience for me. I could only imagine what the atmosphere would be like - would management end sentences with, "I want to see touchdowns everyone" or would conversations between the staff be limited to listing off sport statistics? Neither of the theories became reality. It has been said before: it's the people who make an office environment what it is. The BC Lions staff allowed for my first work term to be a positive experience. They treat their interns like equals since they realize how important we are to the team and engage us in their fun, yet professional, working environment.

My experience at the BC Lions allowed me to learn first-hand the inner workings of a professional sports team. Even though I have no aspirations to work in the sports industry, I will look back at my time with the Lions and know that I had a pretty cool job. Was taking the time off school worth it? Definitely. ◀

› *How to Survive an Ontario Winter continued from Page 7*

All joking aside, a co-op term in Ottawa (even if it falls in the winter term) is one to actively pursue. As we are now reflecting on our past eight months as students here, and look forward to another four this summer as "real employees", we both count our terms as our most positive to date. When this posting becomes available in September, apply. Then, hit your local MEC and stock up on polar fleece. ◀

› *Where Are They Now continued from Page 6*

Now working on a multitude of projects in corporate communication such as company positioning, employee communications, and marketing (including lead-generation and sales initiatives) for her and Kim's varied client base, Kristine feels that she is "challenged in a totally different way - everything you do makes an impact. When you are part of a 4000-person company, your contributions can feel like a very small piece of the pie but working in your own company you can really see the impact made by your decisions."

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# Statistics Corner

	05-1	04-3
<b>Who we are</b>		
New admits	42	34
Returning students	54	62
Total students enrolled	96	96
<b>Who's doing what</b>		
Eight-month term	17	17
First co-op	20	20
Second co-op	25	25
Third co-op	9	9
Fourth co-op	6	6
Fifth co-op	4	4
Part-time co-op	0	1
Self-directed co-op	5	5
<b>Where we're working</b>		
Greater Vancouver	56	48
Out-of-town	5	6
Overseas	3	6
<b>Who we're working for</b>		
Federal government	20	20
Provincial government	2	2
Municipal government	0	0
Government agencies	13	13
Not-for-profit	6	6
Private	23	23
<b>What other programs we're placed with</b>		
Arts Co-op	16	2
Business Co-op	10	3

As Kristine moves forward with Klear Communication, she will take with her the confidence she gained from co-op and the advice she passes on to up-and-coming Communication Co-op students is: "in co-op, you can focus on things you love, you can be creative, you can put great plans together and show the company, the managers and yourself that you can do great things." And for Kristine, she'll continue down a successful path, doing what she loves with Klear Communication. ◀

[www.klearcommunication.com](http://www.klearcommunication.com)