This spring I spent a co-op term working as a Public Affairs Intern for the United States Consulate General Vancouver. Although a quieter post than perhaps Ottawa or Baghdad, Vancouver offered up many exciting opportunities and experiences for me as a fourth-year political science student.

"Working in public affairs is exciting—especially for the US Department of State. Every day is different at the Consulate."

Practicing public diplomacy in Vancouver for the Consulate was a great introduction to international affairs and cross-border cultural relations. Thanks to my past co-ops, my small but effective network came in handy when programming events for the Consulate throughout Metro Vancouver.

As most media will go first through Ottawa before coming to Vancouver, much of our work here is based on public diplomacy. For me, this included hosting Digital Video Conferences with American experts who presented on topics to key audiences, facilitating a meet-and-greet with the Consul General, the Mayor of Abbotsford, the Abbotsford Youth Commission, and the Harlem Globetrotters, and filming a short web-series on past women alumni of the State Department’s International Visitor’s Leadership Programs for Women’s History Month.

Working in public affairs is exciting - especially for the US Department of State. Every day is different at the Consulate; there are always new and exciting projects to take on. My co-interns and I were given lots of responsibility; we were able to represent the Consulate at various events and meetings, and drafting notes for speeches and cables. We were also proud to be members of the US Consulate’s team at the 2013 Vancouver Sun Run, which was a great experience.

I was lucky enough to be present for Ambassador David Jacobson, the United States Ambassador to Canada’s visit to Vancouver in early April. This was quite the opportunity for us as interns, and an experience I know I’ll appreciate throughout my career.
I’ve recently attained citizenship to the Czech Republic, and as I prepare to spend my summer in Prague on an SFU Field School, the idea of working internationally has become quite attractive. It was always a treat to hear my supervisor talk about her previous postings in Jamaica and Poland. Thanks to the US Consulate, this idea also appears to be more of a realistic option than a daydream. Perhaps the Canadian Embassy in Prague needs a Public Affairs Intern…

It will be a bitter-sweet goodbye at the end of April, but I hope the following interns have an equally rewarding experience with the Consulate, working for the US Department of State in the heart of downtown Vancouver.

Government insight working at the PFC

Darcy Vermeulen
Pacific Federal Council Secretariat

While being a resident of the Lower Mainland has its geographic perks – namely the mountains at our back and the ocean on our doorstep – the Rockies’ formidable presence have historically left us cut off from the rest of country. This has been especially true when it comes to government. Ottawa is seen as a distant place where government happens. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The footprint of the federal government

“It is a phenomenal opportunity to experience first hand the varied work and impact of the federal government across the province”
Considering that the Canada Revenue Agency processes over 25.6 million returns a year and collects over 4.3 billion dollars in taxes, it is of the utmost importance that Canadians have easy access to not only the tax rules, but their personal tax information as well. This is where my role as a Taxpayer Services Agent comes into play. During the last eight months, I worked in a fast-paced call centre environment where I answered nationwide telephone enquiries from taxpayers and their representatives on individual income tax related inquiries. The core of my duties was to take calls and do the appropriate research from numerous internal databases and sources to determine whether to answer myself or to transfer the taxpayer to the appropriate department or individual.

The CRA team (through training and hands-on experience on the phones) really did a great job in extensively teaching me “Professionalism, Cooperation, Respect, and Integrity are not only instilled in the organization, but in myself as well.”

Paul learned a great deal about tax questions during his eight months at the Canada Revenue Agency.

Overall, through researching enquiries, providing a reference, probing, dealing with fellow co-workers and thousands of taxpayers, and upholding legislation and confidentiality, I truly found that the four CRA core values: Professionalism, Cooperation, Respect, and Integrity are not only instilled in the organization, but in myself as well.
What Can I Do in Government?

Upcoming Event: What Can I Do in Government (January 2014)
Connect with alumni, current students and professionals with experience working in the federal and provincial public service sectors in Ottawa, Victoria, and Vancouver and hear what they have to say about the work, the people, and the opportunities.

Sample Positions Previously Held by SFU Co-op Students

- Canadian Security Intelligence Service
  Co-op Student
- Foreign Affairs & International Trade Canada
  Political/Economic and Public Affairs Intern
- Human Resources & Skills Development Canada
  Policy Analyst
- Canada Border Services Agency
  Travellers’ Services Representative
- Parks Canada
  Internet Content and New Media Student
- Ministry of Labour
  Employment Standards Officer
- Ministry of Education
  Assistant Marking Administrator
- City of North Vancouver
  Research Assistant
- BC Assessment
  Appraiser Trainee

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