Bridging into Careers with the Federal Government

Graduation is fast approaching and it is your turn to be the sophisticated intellectual strutting across the stage! But after your graceful exit from academia, what lies ahead? If you worked for the federal government during one of your co-op placements, then welcome to the world of bridging!

What is Bridging?
Getting hired after applying to a job posting by the federal government is like winning a marathon—the journey is long and the odds of winning are slim. Luckily, however, a mechanism called bridging was created to allow departments to hire new graduates quickly.

Who is Eligible for Bridging?
To bridge, you must meet three criteria, you must be graduated, be a former employee of the federal government through co-op, FSWEP, or RAP and meet the merit criteria of the position.

How to Bridge
The main thing to remember is that you need to take initiative and approach employers.

Here are a few strategies to consider:

The Foot in the Door
Try seeking student employment with a department you’re interested in bridging into. After graduation, you can approach your departmental contacts.

The “Knock, Knock. Who’s There?”
This strategy involves contacting several government departments and inquiring about available positions. This approach requires extensive preparation, such as researching contacts and sending out cover letters and resumes. After meeting with a few directors, you may be offered a bridging opportunity.

The Casual
Sometimes departments do not have permanent positions to fill, but they have casual work available. If you accept a casual contract, you’re still eligible for bridging after the contract is finished.

To learn more about bridging visit http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/sas-sde/stf-dot/sbm-mie-eng.htm •
Valuable Work Experience, Unexpected Co-op

by Bianca Williamson

As an Economics student, I figured my co-op opportunities would be restricted to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. To my surprise I was a successful candidate for a Business Co-op position with the Financial Institutions Commission of BC (FICOM). Since I had never worked in any government position before, I thought co-op would be the perfect opportunity to get my foot in the door. As a Licensing Analyst in the insurance department of FICOM, I work with a small group of co-workers on a daily basis to regulate insurance companies that are licensed in BC. My position required me to understand the legislation that applies to these insurance companies while ensuring that they comply with it. A major part of my job was to write briefing documents on the status of an insurance company for the Superintendent to approve. Writing material for the decision maker was quite intimidating at first; luckily I was able to take part in a short presentation given by the Deputy Superintendent on how to write briefing documents - one benefit of working for the government. This was just another opportunity for me to improve and gain new valuable skills through my Co-op placement. I also had the chance to participate in conference calls, business meetings and interviews, thus, improving my communication skills.

As I enter my second semester at FICOM, I hope to continue gaining new skills, while continuing to make a positive impact on the organization in hopes of returning once I finish school. This Licensing Analyst position is more than an entry level position; I am given the responsibility to make analytical decisions on the work that I do, which ultimately influences the Superintendent’s decisions. I would highly recommend Co-op to all SFU students that are looking to gain a valuable work experience.

A Learning Experience with ETC

by Lorna Richardson

Just the other day at work, I used Play-Doh to demonstrate to 11 and 12 year olds how stereotypes are created. Although this activity doesn’t seem monumentally important, professional, or particularly dignified, the lesson plans developed by my supervisor, Fabiana Gennari, were designed to resonate within the elementary schoolchildren I work with and to equip them with the social skills required to survive high school and later life. I chose to work with the “Et Cetera” Program (ETC) for the City of Surrey because I had worked with adolescent youth in a leadership capacity previously and found it incredibly rewarding. I also brought extensive conflict resolution skills to this position through my past Co-op work at an addiction recovery house for adult women. I derive great joy from witnessing a child grasp a concept, so I was drawn to this position as a Youth Worker working with at-risk children within the Community Schools Partnership in Surrey. Through working with this organization, I...
have improved my communication skills by interacting individually with the students and have been challenged to develop my group management skills as well. Since I am pursuing a joint major in Women’s Studies and Psychology, and an Education Minor in Counselling Psychology at Simon Fraser University, this position cultivated my desire to become a school counsellor, working individually with high-risk youth to help them realize their potential. While this position is rewarding in and of itself, the Arts and Social Sciences Co-op department allowed it to count for Co-op credit as an additional benefit, showing the benefit and flexibility of the Co-op program. All in all, I could not be happier with my Co-op experience this term, and have already submitted my request for a work term extension!

Adams Insurance: Opportunity that Need Not be Overlooked

by Jaclyn Moore

This January, I began the first of my co-op work terms at the Adams Group Insurance company; a well-established, family-owned insurance brokerage, which has been in business for over fifty years. Its two offices combined sell four types of insurance: auto, home, pharmacy, and life. At this company, I have a position as an Insurance Broker, specializing in auto insurance. With my Broker’s Licence sponsored by Adams Insurance, I am permitted to sell all types of general insurance.

As an Autoplan agent, I explain different coverage options to clients and ensure that their vehicles are adequately covered and that they have sufficient liability coverage. It is required that all insurance agents remain up-to-date with ICBC’s rules and regulations. In addition to serving customers, I am responsible for keeping our stock and inventory accounted for. Some of the other procedures I do are standard offices procedures, which include filing, photocopying, preparing letters and mail, faxing notices, answering customer inquiries over the phone, and office banking, helping me to better understand the inner workings of an office. As a Psychology student, I was interested in a research type of co-op position; however, most of these jobs required prior office experience, which I did not have. Adams Insurance seemed like a perfect opportunity to gain this type of experience. My position as an insurance broker has been valuable in helping me to develop my organizational, problem-solving, and multi-tasking skills. My customer service skills have also improved greatly due to the amount of interaction I have with customers.

Insurance is something that all individuals must purchase, this means that the clientele I deal with is quite varied; I help customers of many different ages, cultures and backgrounds, which has allowed me to put my background of Psychology to use, and to develop my understanding of people even further.

For the time being, I am unsure as to what I would like to do when I finish at SFU. I will always have my insurance licence if I decide to pursue working in the field of insurance. The Adams Group often hires its Co-op students permanently after the term finishes, and is very flexible for students who wish to work part-time during their studies. Working in an office setting is, in itself, a valuable experience for anyone wanting to work in a professional setting. Working at a family-owned company has provided me with an insight into what is involved in running a business, and has shown me that independent companies can prove to be successful with hard work.
“Can I Help You With Anything Else?”

by Candy Ho, Arts and Social Sciences Co-op Alumni & SFU Student Life Coordinator

It was because of this very question that I landed my current job today. I was a Co-op student in my 2nd work term with SFU Student Development. The department played a central role in organizing campus events and programs, and to this day I am still amazed at my supervisor’s ability to accomplish everything she sets out to do. Seeing that she had so many tasks to juggle, a few weeks into my 4-month work term I wanted to help her with additional responsibilities and to learn from her experience. So, I popped “the question”: “Krista, what else can I do to help?”

This was an open-ended question that did not facilitate a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. She was appreciative and delegated tasks to me right away. By doing so, I was exhibiting the “can-do” attitude employers look for, yet do not mention explicitly in job descriptions. This is an important point to keep in mind as Co-op students: you might not necessarily have the technical skills and knowledge (which is probably why you are applying for Co-op jobs in the first place), but if you show employers you have the motivation to do what it takes, you will present yourself as a worthy candidate. Therefore, I encourage you to:

- Be solution-focused and willing to do tasks beyond your job description. Consider yourself a problem solver and look for gaps you can assist with.
- Be proactive and thoughtful even as a Co-op student because you are an employee of the company you work for. Adopt the motto of “leaving it better than when you found it”. In my co-op position mentioned above with Student Development, I was asked to compile information to email monthly to our volunteers; instead I exercised my creativity and started a monthly e-newsletter, which is still being sent out today.

- Be positive and “shiny”. My current Co-op student (Yes, I’ve now become a co-op employer!) simply lights up the room with her contagious enthusiasm. I already love my job, but her presence makes me excited to come to work that much more. This could be the impact you have on your employer and the people you work with.

- Be curious and ask questions. The beauty of being a Co-op student is that employers understand you are developing transferable skills and are willing to help you. All you need to do is ask for their help, expertise, and feedback.

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Upcoming Events • Summer 2010

- June 14th - Discover Co-op & Federal Government 101 with Alvin Lau
- June 17th - Co-op Resume Design Make Over Workshop
- July 14th - Co-op Self-Directed Work Search Workshop

Details on Symplify - www.sfu.ca/wil/symplify

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