“Student Border Services Officer (SBSO) Umar” might seem like a bit of a mouthful to say, but trust me when I say that the title is worth the baggage! Working with the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) has been an incredibly dynamic opportunity I have been lucky to secure through Co-op. As a federal law enforcement agency responsible for border, immigration and customs enforcement services in the postal, marine, land and air modes of transportation, CBSA offers a wide range of experiences. I worked both in the Vancouver International Mail Centre and Cruise Ship Terminals, promoting compliance with Canada’s border, enforcement, tax legislation and regulations through responsible enforcement.

Initially applying for this position caused me some apprehension considering I have no training in law enforcement and come from an International Studies and World Literature background. I soon realized that this position is not just for those with a criminology background. With the extensive training CBSA gives student officers, you definitely feel well equipped to take on the job. One day you’re actually doing the work that you’re watching CBSA officers
do on T.V. It’s a surreal, challenging, engaging and educational experience.

At the Cruise Ship Terminals, the work involves determining passenger admissibility into Canada, reading and deconstructing E311 declaration cards, applying immigration legislation, conducting and assisting in passenger and crew member inspections onboard cruise ships, and ensuring compliance with border regulations. In the Mail Centre, I intercept contraband goods from entering Canada, while assessing duties and taxes on parcels. Familiarizing myself with x-ray machinery, drug identification equipment, and declaration forms have been an integral part of both areas, alongside carrying out enforcement against any contraband goods.

Employment with the CBSA has enhanced some of my pre-existing skills and abilities along with fostering a new skillset that I can utilize in future opportunities in a major way. From the get go the job requires utilizing analytical and critical thinking in the fast paced, often stressful, work environments. Getting used to making tough calls on the spot increases your self-confidence. Working with the public develops your cross cultural awareness, gives you a global perspective, all while optimizing your communication skills. Having high integrity, professionalism and a good understanding of CBSA’s values is a big part of the job, and the client services aspect keeps you accountable for your actions within that context. Working with a team of people who are relying on you also enhances your interpersonal abilities while improving your organizational skills.

Working as part of a team teaches you to not only respect those around you but also to respect yourself. The skills and abilities that my stint with the CBSA has given me have increased my confidence in myself, and thus my respect. I would definitely recommend pursuing a Co-op opportunity with the CBSA.

Learning in Shifts

Jaclyn Marshall at the RCMP

This past spring I worked in PRIME Transcription and Client Support as part of the Centralized Transcription Unit with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The Centralized Transcription Unit receives files from RCMP detachments all over British Columbia and is responsible for processing each file into a central information system called PRIME - the Police Records Information Management Environment. Through this central system, police agencies across BC can access the same information - a crucial necessity for a province as diversely policed as British Columbia.

The unit also supports RCMP personnel who require assistance with PRIME related issues. This required troubleshooting issues and speaking with clients to help resolve the problem. Working in a unit with multiple responsibilities, I got the opportunity to learn about and work with many different tools involved in supporting police services.

A unique aspect of this co-op position was the opportunity to experience working a shift work schedule. As a student wanting to go into a policing career, the chance to see if I could hack the challenges of shift work was a definite bonus. Shift work is not for everyone - with the long hours, rotating schedule, and night shifts. Learning to adjust your sleep patterns, your routines, and your social life is a challenge. You really see how this impacts what you’ve come to expect and grown used to in your life. For anyone thinking about a policing career, I would recommend embracing opportunities that entail shift work; try it out and see if it’s a lifestyle that works for you. At times it was hard, but I personally enjoyed
working shift work and did not find it overly difficult to adjust to the schedule - perhaps I have my semesters of all-night paper writing to thank for that.

This work term has provided insight into how complex law enforcement agencies are. Prior to this work term, when I thought about working in law enforcement, I thought only of being a police officer. I now know there are many different areas and civilian opportunities that ultimately work towards the same goals.

Working for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is an amazing opportunity for any students who are planning on, or thinking about, a career in law enforcement. Through my co-op term with the RCMP, I have gained valuable knowledge and experience applicable to my potential future career and leave knowing how many other opportunities exist.

Safeguarding Canadians

Ronald Yeung at the Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy

“Bankruptcy” is a word no one wants to hear. It is a word with negative connotations and usually means one is no longer financially stable. However, what many do not know is that Canada’s bankruptcy system is restorative and designed to help insolvent individuals get back onto their feet and reestablish their lives.

The Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy is located within Industry Canada’s 20+ agencies, boards, and offices. Through maintaining the efficiency and effectiveness of the insolvency system, promoting awareness of the rights and responsibilities of the parties involved, and ensuring trustee and debtor compliance within the legislative and regulatory framework, the OSB contributes to Canada’s marketplace by protecting the integrity of the bankruptcy and insolvency system.

The majority of my work at the OSB involved statistical analysis of the Vancouver Office’s operations, as well as that of the Western Region. In addition to generating various reports, I had the opportunity to assist Bankruptcy Analysts with their Annual Banking Reviews, evaluate the applications of individuals wanting to obtain their Bankruptcy and Insolvency Counselor licenses, and work on Trustee Compliance, Debtor Compliance, and Complaints-related projects. With a willing-to-learn attitude and support from my managers and co-workers, I was able to successfully complete the projects I was assigned.

My work experience at the OSB has largely opened my eyes to the numerous career paths possible within the Public Service of Canada. As Canada’s largest employer, the Public Service offers employment in every field possible. From Accounting to Forestry, to Health Sciences to Mathematics, there are many one-of-a-kind careers within the Public Service. In addition, the federal government is an employer that believes in growth and potential. It is often willing to send employees to courses and programs to improve their ability to perform their duties. Furthermore, the Public Service offers competitive salaries and benefits for their employees.

I recommend all co-op students complete a work term in the public sector. Regardless whether you are working for a municipal organization, a provincial agency, or a federal department, the experience is career changing. In addition to gaining new transferable skills, the ability to work with professionals from all walks of life and different career paths is an experience that would change the way you look at your own career goals and the path needed to get you there.

Working for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is an amazing opportunity for any students who are planning on, or thinking about, a career in law enforcement. Through my co-op term with the RCMP, I have gained valuable knowledge and experience applicable to my potential future career and leave knowing how many other opportunities exist.
It’s All Related

Elinor McNamee-Annett
at Parks Canada

During the Spring 2014 semester I had the pleasure of doing a co-op placement with the External Relations Department of Parks Canada. It was my second co-op term, but my first placement with the federal government, and the start to what I am hoping to be a long career serving Canadians as part of the public sector. I could not have asked for a better department to start my journey with.

Being a fourth year International Studies student, the most common question I was asked was “Parks Canada... how is that related to your degree?” At first I was unsure myself, but as I became more comfortable in my position I was able to start seeing parallels with my studies, and developing skills from my extracurricular activities and previous work placements.

Parks Canada is one of the oldest and leading conservationist organizations in the world. By working with such a well established branch of the government, I was able to gain invaluable insight into the inner workings of federal bodies. Furthermore, working in the External Relations department allowed me to learn all about government standards in branding, public outreach, and media relations. Another large part of my placement was developing a social media best practices guide for the Coastal BC Field Unit.

One of the biggest things I appreciated about my team at Parks Canada was their willingness to let me work independently and develop a piece of policy that I thought would be useful to the Coastal BC field unit. With the perfect amount of insight and guidance from my supervisors and the rest of my team, I found that I greatly enjoy working with policy, and may in fact be considering a future career with this in mind.

A co-op term is what you make it. Make sure that when you are applying for positions you are looking at job descriptions and not just titles or names of companies. At the end of the day, you want to ensure that your resume is filled with transferrable skills and tangible experience. If I had turned down the position with Parks Canada because I did not see the direct relation to my degree, I would have missed out on a vastly formative experience.