The McGill Mentor Program

Branch out and explore your possibilities

Winter 2013 Newsletter **Published by the McGill Career Planning Service (CaPS)**

Happy 2013! I want to welcome all of our new mentors and mentees to the McGill Mentor Program. Over the last six months, we gained 250 new mentors and received 149 new student mentee applications! It is wonderful to see our program develop in such a manner, and I look forward to working with you all.

This issue of the Mentor Newsletter is filled with contributions from many of our mentors and mentees. From school-to-work transition tips to mentorship stories, the career information in these articles is thoroughly helpful.

Thanks to each and every one of you for your continued support of the McGill Mentor Program; our program only remains so successful due to your committed participation!

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Updates

Get even more connected with the McGill community by joining us on LinkedIn! The "McGill University Career Planning Service (CaPS) and Alumni Exchange" offers McGill University alumni to further assist current student with their career endeavors, as well as stay updated with career events taking place on our campus.

Our Mentorship Experiences

Bob Rabin, a mentor with the McGill Mentor Program, is a Research Meteorologist in the United States. He received both his Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees from McGill.
Joelle Thorgrimsom is a student mentee; she is currently completing her Master of Science degree in Physics.

When Bob received an opportunity to enroll in the Mentor Program a couple years ago, it resonated with him because of his interest in mentoring McGill students. Given his background in physical science, he was contacted by Joelle through the McGill Mentor Program. Joelle was looking for help in sorting out her career path and wanted to tap into Bob's experiences for future studies and employment. Although the two are located in two different countries, they have met on Skype several times to discuss Joelle's concerns.

Bob and Joelle discussed topics such as: whether and when to pursue a PhD; the importance of volunteer activities in academic and professional development; as well as differences in culture and working environments in academia, government research institutions and private industry. Perhaps the most important topic they discussed is how to recognize and follow your passion in choosing a career path. This highlighted the diversity of pathways which can lead to a successful and satisfying career.

For Bob, it has been a rewarding experience discussing these issues in light of the path he took in life, and the varied experience of others in finding their careers. Speaking with Joelle brought back good memories of his time as a student at McGill, and also reminded him of those uncertainties which most students face as graduation approaches.

Joelle found her meetings with Bob very helpful. Bob answered all of her questions by sharing his experiences in and out of meteorology. For example, it was nice to hear that a big part of finding a career that suits you depends partially on luck and that you must always be open to new ideas. Bob had also provided career options that Joelle had never thought about including a space weather program. She would like to send a personal thank you to Bob for all his help!

Helpful Hints for Transitioning from School to the Workplace

Corina Sferdenschi received her Bachelor of Science from McGill University in 2009; she then went on to complete a Graduate Diploma of Public Relations at McGill in 2011. She now works as a Communications and Publications Manager with the Students' Society of McGill University.

Graduating from university has always been daunting, and many graduates find themselves asking how they will go about finding a job. Some programs have delineated career paths, therefore, finding a job

becomes a much easier task; however, other programs have a broader spectrum of possibilities. Remember that it takes time to accommodate to a different lifestyle and schedule, so give yourself the time to adjust.

- One of the most important aspects to keep in mind when looking for a job is to apply for a job that you will enjoy doing. There is nothing more unfulfilling than to be in a job that will not contribute to your learning and that you will not enjoy performing.
- Match the job to the field of your desired career path. You may not see results right away, but if you do something that makes you feel worthwhile and is in the field you wish to pursue, then you will be able to reap great benefits during your time there.
- Be careful to respect work environment rules. Most students are used to sometimes skipping classes, arriving late, or changing their schedules at the last minute. Unfortunately, work requires a lot more responsibility; your actions will have an impact on your evaluation and on how far you will get in that job.
- Don't undervalue yourself. Some employers or other colleagues may have a tendency to undervalue your skill sets or to consider you as being less knowledgeable; keep in mind to always value your abilities and your potential to grow. If you made it through university, you can make it through your first job with all its challenges. Be confident and know that you can bring a lot to the position.

Advice I Wish I Had When I Was A Student

Bupe Mwaikambo received her PhD in Pharmacology and Therapeutics from McGill in 2009. She now works as a Medical Writer with IC Axon.

Going into graduate school, I was extremely naïve. Pursuing a PhD was simply the next logical step after my Bachelor's degree—it would pave the way to a fantastic job and a big fat paycheck… little did I know!

Looking back, I am grateful for the experiences that led to my PhD; but had I been better prepared, and informed, grad school would have been far less stressful and more rewarding. So I ask myself, "What advice do I wish I had before embarking on a PhD?"

- ***Select the right mentor (supervisor), project, and laboratory***. Find out everything you can about the mentors you're interested in. Think about what you'd like to do in their lab and why you're a good fit. Once in, don't feel pressured to stay in an environment where you're unhappy or unmotivated.
- ***Learn to number your days***. Graduate school is a long-term commitment and investment; plan and strategize effectively so that you manage your time wisely. Don't enter into grad school without establishing your career goals and objectives. Think and plan diligently about what you expect from your degree. As Winston Churchill said, "He who fails to plan is planning to fail."

- ***In your pursuit of research excellence, don't neglect your personal growth and development.*** There is a great big world outside the lab—focus on discovering and developing your life's purpose as aggressively as you pursue your research. When you know your purpose, your passion, hard work, and persistence will drive you towards attaining your goals.
- ***Don't be afraid to fail.*** Research is synonymous with rejection—you must learn to live with it. You need to develop thick skin and confidence; such character development will go a long way in preparing you for future challenges.
- ***Cultivate passion and enthusiasm for your research topic.*** This is your driving force; it will propel you to greater fulfillment in grad school. Try not to become jaded by the process. Surround yourself with inspiring and innovative people: "greatness is contagious; you'll catch it if you get around it"(TD Jakes).
- ***Get networking.*** To help advance your education and career, make personal connections with everyone you meet. Forget shyness, be assertive.

Overall, I've learned that to succeed in grad school you need grit—a willingness to commit to long-term goals and to persist in the face of difficulty… to never give up!

To our student mentees: *CaPS offers a wide variety of resources to help you with preparing for graduate and professional schoolings, as well as with finding the right program for you! Book an appointment at our office to meet with an advisor, or check out our upcoming workshops and school fairs on myFuture. We are happy to assist you!*

Five Tips for Building an Effective Mentoring Relationship

Cynthia Donahue earned her Bachelor of Arts from McGill University in 2006; she presently is employed as a Senior Employee Relations Representative in Montreal.

Mentoring is a powerful tool that can launch your career forward, whether you're looking for your first job out of university, or looking to advance through the executive ranks. I've been lucky enough to have come across a number of individuals in my career who have taken on informal mentoring roles. More recently, I have also had the opportunity to wear the mentor hat. From each experience, I've grown professionally and personally. As an HR professional, I've also seen the benefits of mentoring within organizations. Here are some tips for getting the most out of your mentoring relationship:

1. ***Set expectations.*** If you're entering a formal mentoring partnership, discussing your expectations from the get-go will help set the relationship up for success. Cover off some basics such as your preferred method of communication and frequency

of meetings. How do you want meetings to unfold – do you want to converse informally about work, or address specific topics at each meeting? As a mentee, set some goals for yourself and discuss what you're looking to get out of the relationship. Regularly going back to these goals will help you stay focused and get the most out of the relationship.

2. ***Be open and honest***. For mentoring relationships to flourish, they need a strong base of mutual respect and trust. Mentoring relationships benefit from being an environment where concerns, insecurities, and challenges can be voiced without fear of judgment. Openly share your experiences and provide candid feedback. If you're asked something you're not comfortable with, let the other person know.
3. ***Be flexible*.** A mentoring relationship will evolve over time, based on where someone is at in their professional and personal life. If you're searching for a new job, working through day-to-day challenges at work, struggling with work-life balance, or living through significant organizational change, the support you'll be looking for will be different. The shape of your relationship may change. As a mentor, be flexible in your approach and tailor your coaching style to your mentee.
4. ***Invest and be committed***. With thriving careers and the pressures of work-life balance, don't let your mentoring relationship fall to your time demands. Make sure you schedule in time for your mentoring partnership. Put some thought into each meeting so that you get the most out of your time together. If you say you're going to do something, make sure you do. If you're not committed, the other person will feel like they're wasting their time.
5. ***Don't be afraid to walk away.*** Whether you've only had three meetings in three months, or have had 30 meetings over a few years, if you've put in a genuine effort and it's no longer working for you, it's okay to walk away. Maybe you've taken your career along a different path or you feel like you've exhausted the relationship; or maybe as a mentor, you don't think you can offer what your mentee is looking for. The key is communicating your decision to the other person. Walking away from a mentoring relationship is not a failure – it may just not be the right match.

The reality is that you'll only get as much out of your mentoring relationship as you put into it, so make sure you're dedicated to the match, and it's sure to help contribute to career success.

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