

In her own words: "It's not about the money. It's about being challenged and feeling inspired by what you're doing."

I bet a lot of graduates with a Linguistics degree aren't sure what they are going to do with it," laughs Shaney Crawford, who felt precisely that way when she left Queen's in 1995.

"However, I've come to think of it as a polymorphous degree that can be made into any number of things. Linguistics is all about patterns, and patterns show up everywhere in life — from languages and cultures to computers and database design."

For some, a Linguistics degree is an express route to a job in speech pathology. For Shaney, however, it has

translated into a lively mix of intersecting career paths. It has taken her to Japan and back, from the role of teacher to administrator and from rigidly defined job descriptions to carte blanche in the workplace.

Since August 2000, she has parlayed her degree into the job of Executive Administrator for The Japan Society, a Toronto-based non-profit organization that offers networking opportunities for

executives at Canadian and Japanese companies. Because she deals with industry giants such as Toyota, Honda and Mitsubishi, her work demands that she be up to date on the Japanese economy. As well, she coordinates special events planning and seminars, produces newsletters and a web site and delivers language classes.

Oddly enough, her passion for studying languages and cultures stems from a

Grade 10 English class in Whitby, Ontario. The mandatory course was devoted entirely to grammar, a fact that made it loathsome to practically every student in the classroom but Shaney.

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"Everyone hated it,

but it was a turning point for me," she recalls. "For the first time, I really understood how language works. Nouns, verbs, clauses — it all came together in patterns that I could recognize and connect. It's like all the cogs in the wheel finally fit together, so the wheel could start turning."

The class would be directly responsible for her tackling a linguistics degree at

Queen's. But first she would spend a "gap" year in England, acting as an assistant matron and then an assistant teacher in a Hertfordshire boarding school. Exploring the country in her spare time was wonderful, but the "matron stuff" was pure drudgery.

"It was very hard to go from being a responsible, educated young adult to 'the girl who wakes us up, sends us to school and does our laundry'. The whole experience profoundly affected the way I approached education, and it sealed my plans to attend university. 'Without a university education, I used to think, I'd be an assistant matron for the rest of my life!'"

Holding that thought, she sprinted to Queen's with one of the university's provincial scholarships in her pocket. She enrolled in the Concurrent Education program; by third year she was studying Linguistics, French, Japanese and Psychology, along with her Education courses.

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By the time she graduated in 1995, she had realized that the job market for pure linguists was thin. Scanning job opportunities in Career Services one day, she discovered the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program. By July 1995, she had settled into a junior high school in rural Japan. In a town of 14,000, she was the only Caucasian.

"It was exactly what I wanted — to live outside the big cities and to learn

Japanese. I stayed in that position for two years. The work was hard because I had some teaching experience in Canada, but I had to learn a great deal about the Japanese system before I could be an effective teacher there. Also, as an assistant language teacher, I was limited in what I could do. But living in Japan was an amazing cultural experience, so I started looking around for other work."



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She lucked into the job of coordinator for an international association when she heard that her predecessor was packing his bags. "It was a fluke. The Japanese had given up trying to find a foreigner and were about to hire a Japanese person, but I imposed myself on them, had my résumé translated into Japanese. After pleading my case for two months I got the job and kept it for three years.

"It may be the best job I'll ever have in my life. The training for it amounted to someone showing me my desk. I had carte blanche to do counselling, translating, teaching, designing a web site, networking, whatever. As long as I stayed within the realm of "international relations," I was free to do what I wanted."

The work was far from lucrative, but Shaney had always taken one piece of career advice to heart: It's not about the money. "I completely agree with that.

It's about being challenged and feeling inspired by what you're doing." Even so, she eventually headed back to Canada. "After five years in Japan, I decided to give Canada a try, since I had never experienced adult life in my own country. When I left Canada in 1995, I was still a student." After

trolling the Web for job leads she landed the Japan Society position and a short-term contract with the Japanese consulate helping administer the JET program.

Now a full-time employee with the Japan Society, she is eyeing a degree in library and information science. "The part of all my jobs that I've loved most

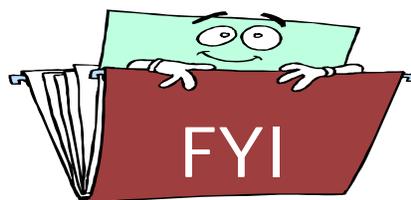
is dealing with information. It all goes back to linguistics — finding patterns and organizing bits of information so that they're digestible." Making things

fit is what Shaney does best. "My closets," she jokes, "are the envy of all my friends." Fortunately, her degree in Linguistics — hardly an obvious match with the business world — has helped her fit quite neatly into that environment. Her strong organizational skills have let her

successfully navigate several career paths, including executive administrator, language instructor and web designer.

"I can't believe I move in the corporate environment. But the fact is that I have some strong basic skills that are highly transferable. As well, I can think clearly and present my ideas confidently. I believe many careers are open to me." ❖

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Many factors play a role in determining career direction, and Shaney readily admits that her strong organizational skills have let her successfully navigate several career paths, including executive administrator, language instructor and web designer. She is now eyeing a degree in library and information science. "The part of all my jobs that I've loved most is dealing with information. It all goes back to linguistics — finding patterns and organizing bits of information so that they're digestible." Making things fit is what Shaney does best. "My closets," she jokes, "are the envy of all my friends."