

Arts and Science Student Benefits from Environmental Internship

By Erik Wright (BSch'17 Environmental Science)



Erik Wright, BSch'17

Throughout my university degree in Environmental Science, I have made it a top priority to take every opportunity to prepare myself for life after school and what I hope to accomplish. When I first arrived at Queen's University, I came with plans to major in Global Development Studies. Later, I enrolled to do the certificate in Geography Information Systems (GIS), as well. I never anticipated that I would be working as an intern in my field, even before I graduated!

The decisions I made to change my university career path culminated with the Queen's Undergraduate Internship Program (QUIP). Through QUIP I found a 12-month internship job that perfectly suited my combination of environmental knowledge and GIS skills I curated during my undergraduate career. I am currently working with the Corporation of the City of Kingston's Environment and Sustainable Initiatives Department (E&SI) as a student intern.

The E&SI department as well as members of the GIS department really embraced my active learning as an intern, and for the first time I feel I have further skills to go alongside my degree and I'm prepared to graduate.

The work done by E&SI helps to improve Kingston by rehabilitating brown-fields, implementing corporate and community climate action plans, executing a number of environmental projects throughout the city, responding to spills and environmental incidents, educating staff and the public, and providing consultation to other departments within the Corporation.

While I've had the chance to learn about their wide range of initiatives, my work relates the most to supporting City projects under the direction of the Manager of Environmental

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Projects. Working in the office with environmental professionals and in the field with experienced environmental technologists, I've had the chance to acquire a wide range of field skills that expands on what I've learned in the classroom, including ground water monitoring and sampling, soil sampling, construction site inspection, and attending to spills.

I take great pleasure in the work I do for the City of Kingston knowing that I am working towards real and measurable objectives that feed into their strategic vision. Across the 12-month internship, I am being assigned a number of my own projects with deadlines, which I am to complete with some guidance from staff and help from a student partner Liam Brand (University of Guelph Environmental Engineering, '17) who has been hired for the summer months. Projects include the development of an Environment GIS layer, implementation of a storm water quality surveillance program, maintenance of a large phytoremediation project and the development of a storm water database.

Many of these projects are listed on the Department Scorecard, a document designed by the Corporate Management Team to track the performance of the Department. Seeing the results of my work and recognition from the corporation gives a deeper level of meaning to my efforts. Coming from

an academic environment where results are often individualized, it has been refreshing to work towards larger goals in such a team oriented setting.

While I've had many opportunities to work in the field, much of the internship involves working in an office environment. Getting the chance to immerse myself in this environment

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before graduation has been incredibly informative. It has given me skills of oral and written communication that build on what I've acquired in the classroom.

While university certainly develops these skills, using them in a hands-on environment is very different.

It is my hope that these types of skills that I acquired through QUIP will smooth out the transition period in my first job after graduation.

As I'm sure fellow students can understand, I found it hard to know and understand the job market from the perspective of an outsider and future prospects after graduation seemed uncertain. Entering the workforce for a year and getting to see what types of environmental work are being done has given me insight into what to expect when I graduate. This really helps me to make more informed decisions about my future.

Through the internship so far, I have learned that a lot of preconceived notions I had about aspects of the work-

ing world turned out to be false, and I have discovered which aspects of the industry I enjoy most. I also learned about a lot of jobs I didn't even know existed!

The internship has been a great way to shift my perspective.

Throughout the entire process, QUIP staff have been very helpful and a great resource. Even once I was successful in getting an internship, they regularly check up on me to ensure I was happy and comfortable with my position, as well as to eagerly ask about my work. It's clear to me that the students are their number one priority, and I have to thank them for facilitating such a great opportunity for me.

Looking to the remainder of my internship, I look forward to continuing the summer field season outdoors before returning to the office to hone my GIS and administrative skills in the fall. After graduation, I am interested in pursuing a wide range of disciplines and applications including remote sensing applications for coastal zone

management, impacts of organic matter turnover in arctic tundra soils, and learning how to install solar panels. The addition of an internship to my degree has given me confidence and a renewed sense of purpose to achieve my career goals thanks to QUIP and the City of Kingston, and I now look forward to what the future will bring.

A group of three people (two men and one woman) are sitting on a dark grey sofa in a modern office or lounge area. They are all looking at their laptops. The room has large windows, a wooden coffee table, and several bicycles parked in the background. The text 'GET EXPERIENCE GET CONNECTIONS GET AN Internship' is overlaid on the left side, and 'QUIP Queen's Undergraduate Internship Program' is overlaid on the right side.

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