

# What are My Options?

## Customize your Career through Getting Involved

By Aleksandra Uzelac



Olivia Martin, BScH '16

Like many students in sciences and health programs, **Olivia Martin** (BScH'16, Life Sciences) came to Queen's set on becoming a doctor. She soon noticed some clues that hinted at additional career options.

“Through my involvement in groups like ASUS Orientation, Learning Strategies’ Peer Learning Assistants (PLA), and the Alma Mater Society Orientation Roundtable, I noticed my interests and strengths were in the realm of business, presentations, and project management.”

Many students wonder what the options are with their degree(s)—even if they started off thinking they knew where they were headed. At a basic level, you can get some ideas of some of the common directions other graduates have taken by consulting resources such as the Major Maps ([careers.queensu.ca/majormaps](https://careers.queensu.ca/majormaps)) or Grad Maps ([careers.queensu.ca/gradmaps](https://careers.queensu.ca/gradmaps)) or connecting with alumni through your department or groups such as Queen's Connects (SEE PAGE 26 – Queen's connects infographic). But, engaging in roles outside the classroom can also help you gain insights into and influence your unique career direction during your degree.

Olivia was surprised how much she learned about the career paths she might want to pursue when she combined her academic accomplishments with the skills and insights she obtained in her co-curriculars. Without really realizing it at first, by engaging in various types of activities, Olivia was customizing her career options.

“While the academics at Queen's gave me the basic knowledge and skills I needed, it was my extra-curricular involvement that added colour to how I view myself and my career path and showed me how and where I want to apply those skills.”

Beyond clarifying career or education goals, branching out is a great way to gain valuable skills—whether you were paid to learn them or not. As an Orientation Roundtable (ORT) Assistant, Olivia managed a \$400,000 budget, got to hold meetings with University and City Officials, and had the opportunity to manage a team, all of which were opportunities she feels gave her a “head start” in the job market after graduation. During interviews, Olivia was able to call upon the experiences and situations that she encountered as an ORT assistant and a PLA in order to solve problems and express her suitability for jobs.

The sum of these experiences led Olivia towards the business sector; a career path she didn't expect when she first entered Queen's. After graduation, Olivia parlayed her Life Sciences degree and extra-curricular experiences into a job as Operations Analyst on the Corporate Operations Team at the woman's clothing brand, Aritzia.

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Shelby Stinnissen, BAH'16

“Working at Stauffer provided me with exposure to many parts of library and academic life, helping me to navigate my interests further.”

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Malcolm Eade, BSCH'18

“I get to work on a science-based venture this summer where I can apply knowledge from my degree and the business skills from my internship.”

– MALCOLM EADE

**Shelby Stinnissen** (BAH'16 Religious Studies) began to explore her career options during her undergrad, by taking on a part-time job. Aiming to work as a librarian someday, Shelby got a job at Stauffer Library through the Work-Study program at Queen's.

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Throughout her four years at Queen's, Shelby worked in a variety of departments within the library, gaining an inside perspective on the intricacies of working in that setting. Along the way, she gained more focus with regard to options for getting to her goal career.

“As I moved from a casual worker, to more individual projects in the summer and then to a more specified position in the Copyright Advisory Office, I became more certain of the career ahead of me and options for the right education to get me there.”

Although Shelby always envisioned herself having a career as a librarian, or information professional, the chance to work in a library during her undergraduate degree confirmed this desire and gave her the confidence needed to pursue this path. It also gifted her with the skills she continues to use today. By participating in public speaking opportunities and staff meetings at Stauffer, Shelby was able to refine her communication skills; skills that have proven to be beneficial during her current Master's degree in *Library and Information Science and Knowledge and Information Management* and her job as a Graduate Student Library Assistant.

**Malcolm Eade** (BSCH'18, Life Sciences) developed an interest in project management and finance, and chose to do a one-year internship through the Queen's University Internship Program (QUIP) in a business-related role this past year.

Not only did Malcolm find out more about where he would like to go next, he also got the chance to develop new skills from working in a professional business setting.

“In the work world, there is no rubric for success like in many undergraduate science classes. Problems are often not clearly defined so it can take some digging to determine what the problem really is, what your success metrics will be and how you will solve, or help solve it.”

As a result of the hands-on experience in the business field, Malcolm now has a new perspective of where he could go next. Most recently, Malcolm joined the Queen's Innovation Summer Initiative (QICSI) program, where he is merging his newly established interest in business and his background in life science into a start-up to develop a chemical sensing platform.

“I get to work on a science-based venture this summer where I can apply knowledge from my degree and the business skills from my internship.”

With one year left in his undergrad, Malcolm is optimistic about the opportunities that lie ahead. “I still haven't honed in on what exactly I want in my career but I am now more excited about the variety of opportunities that are available rather than worrying about finding a job that narrowly fits my degree plan.”

**Joyce Leung** (B.Ed.'18, BAH'17, Psychology) wanted to find co-curricular activities that would help her gain additional skills for her desired career as a teacher. For the past three years, Joyce has been serving as a Peer Learning Assistant (PLA) for Queen's Student Academic Success Service and has become a Team Leader among the PLAs. This opportunity is allowing her to customize her career by allowing her to gain even more evidence of her mentorship and leadership skills.

Through her work with the Learning Strategies department, Joyce has also discovered the types of environments in which she would like to work. "My volunteer experience has shown me how much I thrive and love working in the Learning Strategies department with students and staff for student learning." Although she recognizes that finding exactly the same work environment may not always be possible, Joyce now knows more about what to look for in a job to help her thrive.

As Joyce enters her final year of the concurrent education program, she has not only developed skills helpful for her future teaching career, but she has also learned more about herself and the type of educator she wishes to become. Looking back at what she has accomplished throughout the past three years, Joyce says, "Without a doubt I will cherish and extend my experience as a PLA into my future endeavours!"

Whether it gave them an edge in interviews, provided them with insight into possible careers, or helped them develop applicable skills that they continue to use today, these four individuals have learned a lot about their careers, through getting involved. As you prepare to graduate, take some time to reflect on your degree(s) as well as your co-curricular experiences in different fields or work environments. What skills have these experiences helped you develop? Are there any insights into the types of environments or work tasks you prefer to engage in that could help you determine some career direction or first steps past graduation?

As Olivia noted, "there are more career options than you can count, and the key is really finding that niche where what you love to do and what you are good at overlap!"

*Aleksandra Uzelac is a  
4th-year Life Sciences student*



Joyce Leung, B.Ed.'18, BAH'17

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