

Business students get jump start on career

On-the-job training provides practical workplace experience

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WINNIPEG, MB—A distinctive cooperative education program at the Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) is giving business students an edge in their preparation for the marketplace.

The Redekop School of Business (RSB) Co-operative Education Program integrates academic learning with on-the-job training that offers students practical experience to succeed in the workforce.

RSB launched the co-op program in 2011, and is unique in Manitoba because it provides double the work experience available at other higher learning institutions.

It offers Christian-based specialized training in accounting, management, non-profit organizations, and human resources.

“We aim to help students get a clear sense of their pathway and the direction they want to go,” says Sherry Funk, RSB program coordinator. “Our students learn important work and communication skills in the classroom and on the job.”

Fifty-four students are currently enrolled at RSB, and of those, six participate in the co-op program.

The co-op program can be

completed in five years or less and includes eight academic terms and six co-op work terms. Each job placement is four months, and students can take on back-to-back placements for eight-month rotations.

“The business co-op program is intended to be win-win,” says Ray Vander Zaag, director of RSB. “Students gain extended periods of employment experience in their field of study, during which time a lot of informal learning occurs, and they have an opportunity to earn some income while in school.

“The businesses gain access to an energetic, young worker, and they are able to identify if that young person would be a good fit for their organization.”

“This is a great work-integrated learning process,” Funk says, adding students typically enter the co-op program in their second year of studies. “Entrance requirements are higher than for the (general) business program. We want students who are determined. They will come out of the program job-ready.”

At least 30 per cent of the students’ time spent in the program is dedicated to on-the-job training. Co-op students’ performance on the job is supervised and evaluated



RSB students have the option to supplement classroom lessons with workplace experience through RSB’s Co-operative Education Program.

Photo courtesy of CMU

by their co-operative employers.

“The co-op program allows students to apply the knowledge they gain in the classroom in real world situations,” says assistant professor Craig Martin. “This improves the learning students get from their university education, and they will gain experience to help them find jobs after they graduate.”

The program is particularly attractive to international students who may have difficulty entering the workforce. And Canadian students who may otherwise lack opportunities to work in an office setting can gain that kind of experience.

“It means that right from the beginning, students have the opportunity for entry level

positions,” Funk says. “By the time they graduate they will not be at entry level.”

Sometimes the job placements result in permanent employment, Vander Zaag adds.

The Manitoba-based businesses involved in the RSB co-op program include Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Manitoba, iDE Canada, Argus Industries, and McDonalds. RSB also makes every effort to match students from other provinces with companies from their hometown.

Organizations interested in offering RSB students work placement through the co-op program are encouraged to fill out a form available on the CMU website. For more information, visit cmu.ca.



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- ▶ Gain professional work experience with practicum and co-op placements
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