

A Reflection on Gaining Work Experience as a Student: An Uphill Journey.

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Abstract

Reflecting on past learnings is an excellent way of understanding personal goals and overall self. This understanding is beneficial as it allows for individuals to conclude on decisions and better a variety of skills. The purpose of this critical reflection is to ponder on all experience, information, and skills gained throughout this university term. This process will be done using past journal entries and tasks demonstrating growth and personal opinions throughout this term, ultimately leading to conclusions on topics such as future employment goals. Throughout this term, I have narrowed my employment goals, broadened essential skills, and gained a detailed understanding of teamwork.

Introduction

An Overview

This course, Work Integrated Learning, started back in January which consisted of info sessions to prepare students for applying and succeeding in their future placements. Starting in May, all students were expected to have found a placement (volunteer or work) that will aid them in fulfilling hours and completing journal entries which touch on the many topics discussed throughout the summer term.

Reflecting on how much I have learned and changed throughout this course is insightful and crucial. Beforehand, I was unsure of what my future employment goals were and if I would have liked my Work Integrated Learning (WINL) placement.

The Journey: How did I get to this Position?

I am a criminology major with a Business Studies minor; with this academic background, I knew that I wanted to work hands-on with communities to make a difference and help injustices that are present within society. I am a Black Métis Woman who has experienced the unjust society that we live in today and have always strived to make a change.

My passion led to my decision to work at Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) with their Treaty eight field unit, which works hands-on with Indigenous Nations to serve their needs. I am about halfway done with my experience with the treaty eight field team at ISC, and I have learned so much from my time so far. My role at ISC is to aid my team in supporting treaty eight nations with any needs or concerns that they may have.

Before starting my WINL work placement, I had no prior work experience and was unsure what I wanted to pursue after graduating from university. With ISC and the WINL program, I have been able to travel, gain critical knowledge beneficial for after my degree, and actively integrate this knowledge into my everyday life. This critical reflection is meant to display an overview of my experience with ISC by stating how it contributed to my future goals, related to the WINL course, and accomplishments made throughout this course.

Overall Structure of this Critical Reflection

This critical reflection will begin by giving some background information on issues encountered when searching for a placement and the impacts that these setbacks caused. Next, this paper will explore all of the skills developed from the knowledge gained in this course and my

placement. In support of this point, this paper will explain how I was able to integrate all topics discussed throughout the WINL course in my placement. I will then touch on the extensive career growth undergone, leading to the conclusion which touches on a summary and what these career goals are.

Fundamental Information

Setbacks Overcome

My time at ISC has opened many new opportunities relating to after-grad and future employment goals. Beforehand, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, I had little to no experience and was unsure of what I wanted to pursue after graduation. To explain, I was lost due to my lack of experience and idea of what options were available to me. This sense of confusion and many unsuccessful interviews left me feeling stumped. To explain, when applying for interviews, I often felt highly underqualified and that I would not be hired, leading to many missed opportunities. In one case, I went through the interview process and was reasonably confident that I would be offered the job; however, that was not the case. This setback left me feeling upset and as if my entire journey would be unsuccessful. However, this feeling of failure was soon relieved when I found my current placement at ISC.

Obtained Skills

My current position allows me to engage with different programs, including my own, within the federal government. I have gained insights and solidified future goals throughout this experience. When completing tasks and assignments for the team, using interrelation skills and networking to gain anonymous information, I try to reach out to programs for information and talk about what their program does to contribute to creating employment goals for myself. This WINL course and experience at ISC have allowed me to explore my passions to a fuller extent. I have been able to ponder upon my studies and sit with myself to think about what I enjoy and want to do after my

undergrad to make a difference in society. This job has allowed me to increase my skills, such as using Microsoft platforms, communication, teamwork, leadership, and networking. These are all skills that I believe are important for any future jobs I may decide to enter after my undergrad and have been core topics of discussion in the differing WINL lectures and assigned readings.

To summarize, my student position has allowed me to develop numerous skills and work in an area that significantly reflects my passions as a Sociology major with a business studies minor. I am passionate about making a difference in society by helping marginalized communities. My time at ISC has allowed me to understand my career needs and the specific environment I enjoy.

Hard Skills and it's Benefits

Skills Integrated into my Placement.

Throughout this course, I have learned countless terms or skills to integrate into my current work placement and future career opportunities. One of the primary elements I focused on was integrating my knowledge learnt from this course into my work placement. I believe that this goal was met in many ways to be expanded upon.

Dynamic Understanding of "Experience"

The class began by discussing the ever-changing understanding of "experience" and how much is needed. Before this course, I had little to no experience in my field of academic study due to reasons such as the COVID-19 pandemic that limited my opportunities to gain experience. Before gaining much knowledge from this WINL course, I was very unsuccessful when applying for jobs, which I believe to be due to a lack of experience. Relating to my current placement, I have been able to network with different individuals from different teams on many occasions to build relationships with people for future job positions in hopes of "finding the right people." For example, the Federal government held a student event allowing students across Canada to interact and network to grow our

connections while gaining information about the government's programs. Additionally, ISC has many up-skill and re-up skills courses to ensure that all employees have up-to-date skills that will ultimately help them in the long run. I have been lucky enough to have to partake in these courses, which I believe will help me immensely in the future.

Post Pandemic Expectations

Another topic covered was centred around new expectations after the pandemic. This point of discussion explored the new skills needed for new work environments, such as work hours and online platforms. My current WINL position is online, meaning there is no commute time, leading to more time to work on assignments. Next, the pandemic has created a need to use online platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Excel, which were barely used before the COVID-19 pandemic. These platforms are heavily present in my position; before starting, my understanding was minimal but is now constantly improving. As a way of communication, my team and I use Microsoft Teams daily, along with most of my tasks being through Excel.

Upskilling

Upskilling and skills gaps were the next discussion point that allowed me to ponder on my work experience. My team creates a weekly team meeting to discuss issues, concerns, questions, and positive outcomes from this past week. This effort allows employers to understand the problems within their field and what skills are needed. In my case, the entire team can discuss what we are doing and where we have found issues. My manager can now identify where there are skill gaps and the progress from the last meeting. I find this very beneficial as it allows me to ponder what I am doing and what may not be working; I can get feedback and help from other individuals who may have experience with my matter.

Teamwork and its Importance: How to be a Better Team Member

Next was teamwork, its importance and necessity in society. Within my placement at ISC, I have had to integrate collaboration into my daily work life and constantly network with various groups. Critical thinking and group-decision making were the following essential discussion points as they are unconsciously present in many activities. During my placement, I learned to think quickly to complete assignments to the best ability with minimal time constraints. My work placement is about helping Nations and their varying needs, leading to my need to maintain an open mind and use critical thinking to address their needs and how I can help. As stated throughout this reflection, my current position is collaborative leading to the importance of group-decision making. When engaging with differing individuals, it is essential to ensure that you stand up for yourself, plan, and take charge. Most of my recent assignments involved the group-decision making topic. To express, I started by making sure to plan to ensure that you have enough time for setbacks and conflicts between other members' schedules. The treaty eight field team does not function on a set schedule as their work is based on Nation's varying needs, meaning that this skill is essential to adapt. I stood up for myself and my skills, allowing for the best possible outcome. By standing up for myself and my skills, I can ensure that the best people complete all tasks for that job. Standing up for myself and my skills, meaning that I am confident in my skills and can vouch for myself when tasks are needed to be done. For example, when completing assignments, I can confidently assure my manager that I am reliable and able to complete it. Finally, I tried to take charge of specific situations when needed. This skill means that I confirmed that everything was going to plan.

Work Inclusion

The final term discussed was work inclusion which heavily relates to my placement and employment goals. Through working closely with differing nations, it is critical to understand and put efforts into work-life inclusions as it is essential to changing and bettering society. To elaborate, when initially applying for this position, being from a

marginalized community was curtail as the position strived to have an immense amount of work inclusion. Often when working with minority groups it is an asset to have workers who can understand their struggles and stories. Trough having many different individuals from different walks of life in a workplace, individuals can provide different assets which allow for the best work outcome. To explain, when working as a group, it is extremely beneficial when all individuals can express their own ideas or thoughts due to different life experiences.

Career Growth

Personal and Career Development

After being at ISC for approximately two months and engaging in various readings and discussions throughout the WINL course, I have noticed a magnitude of growth. This course and its content have taught me how to be a better team member and the essential aspects of collaborating. Beforehand I would have never imagined that I could have enjoyed a job position like the one that I am in currently due to how heavy its teamwork factor is. I have grown in understanding how to collaborate and its necessity, leading to significant growth in my future career goals. I have discussed with my mentor the future steps I could make once I have graduated to return to the Federal government of my current position. Throughout this discussion, I have also integrated many terms from the course, such as critical thinking and skills. To explain, I have narrowed my future career options and goals using the essential thinking skills by engaging in differing up-skilling opportunities offered.

Conclusion

Summary: Then to Now.

To conclude, my time as a student working hands-on with the treaty eight field team has opened many doors and opportunities. This experience, however, was topped with the knowledge I learned

from the WINL course. I am now knowledgeable in various fields, which have broadened my skills and allowed me to conclude on future employment goals. Before this term, I was confused and lost with finalizing future employment plans. This feeling led to procrastination when deciding where to apply and how to summarize my personal employment goals. After experiencing the workforce and going through many setbacks that felt impossible to overcome, my desires are apparent. Through gaining an academic understanding and hands-on experience from my work placement and the WINL course, it is possible to state that my mission to gain work experience, even with the struggles that may occur, has been met. Taking action and enrolling in the course have allowed me to understand myself and my career aspirations and obtain various skills essential to employment.

What does the Future Hold?

This experience expressed at length throughout this critical reflection has led to many life-changing experiences, such as future employment goals. After many extensive talks with my mentor, I hope to return to the treaty eight field team after I graduate or to work for other departments such as Women and Gender Equality (WAGE). After attending info sessions and gaining career experience, I have established clear career goals and am incredibly grateful for this experience. I have networked with many individuals who have shared their experiences within different programs, which has ultimately helped me in these decisions.

To conclude, this term started with many obstacles I was forced to overcome and grow with simultaneously. Throughout this course and my current WINL work placement, I have gained countless skills, overcome difficult hardships, and achieved an idea of what I would like to pursue after graduation.