

# Meaningful work wanted

## PROGRAM OPENS DOORS TO NEW OPPORTUNITIES

### Initiative targets business students seeking jobs with conscientious firms or in the non-profit sector

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Jevone Nicholas had been working in the private sector for five years after university before deciding that something was missing. His work, as a commercial printing co-ordinator at a newspaper in southern Ontario, was challenging enough, but he felt unfulfilled.

"I had an epiphany in 2000 when I was on vacation in Europe," says Nicholas, 31. "I was in Geneva and was visiting the museums of various international organizations, including the Red Cross. I saw photographs of people my age doing wonderful things, things I wanted to do. I was interested in international development but I realized I needed more competencies."

So Nicholas signed on at McGill University to get a masters of business administration and graduated last year into a job as an analyst in the Canadian International Development Agency in Ottawa.

During his MBA years, he also took advantage of a new program that puts business students into summer internships in non-profit organizations. The program, called the Community Experience Initiative (CEI), is the brainchild of Kariann Aarup and Eric Steedman, both McGill MBA graduates.

Formed in 2000, the program is getting attention from business students who want to work in socially or environmentally conscientious businesses or in the non-profit sector.

Aarup, a PhD candidate at l'École des Hautes Études Commerciales, has been teaching undergraduates in McGill's management faculty since 1999.

"Students would tell me they were interested in social and environmental issues but they wondered how to find work in these areas," she said.

"We know that organizations in that sector need the kinds of skills business students have but they tell us that they never thought of recruiting in business schools."

Two years ago, CEI, which works with business schools across Canada, began organizing summer internships for students at the undergraduate and graduate level.

"The first summer, we placed five students in jobs," Aarup said. "Last year, we had 200 applications for 10 positions. This summer, we have 20 positions open."

Because many non-profit employers cannot match the salaries students would normally get in the corporate sector, CEI pays half of the students' salaries by getting grants from various foundations.

Bruno Mital, executive director of Kids Help Phone - Quebec, a telephone counselling line for children, says he'd like to get a business student into his workplace this summer.

"We need someone to look at our marketing plan to make sure it's pertinent and compatible with Quebec culture," he said.

Mital was among several non-profit employers at a career event CEI organized at McGill last week, which drew 140 business students from McGill, Concordia University and HEC.

"I made a presentation about our organization, and students came up to me afterward to say they had never considered working in the non-profit sector

before, but they would now."

Business schools may seem an unlikely venue in which to recruit candidates for the non-profit sector but students, alumni and professors say they sense a growing desire among many business students to work in environments in which their work will have a social impact.

Johanne Turbide, a professor of accounting at HEC, said she was surprised at the turnout at last week's career event at McGill. "You hear about students being apathetic but that's not what I saw. I saw students who want to be useful, who want to have meaningful work," she said.

Alexandra Schwartz certainly does. After completing a bachelor's degree, she spent 12 years working in the retail industry as a manager and buyer in two

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MBA student Alexandra Schwartz

Gianni Versace stores. "I was at the top of my career. I was doing well, had a great life and travelled extensively. But I left because I wasn't satisfied," she said.

She's now in the first year of an MBA at McGill. "I want to have an impact on business in a different way."

For Schwartz, that doesn't mean working in the non-profit sector. "I want to work in the private sector but I want to work in a socially responsible company that believes that adding value for stakeholders is not only measured in profits at the end of the year. I want to use my degree to impact the way business approaches the bottom line in the international and local environment."

Caroline Roger attended the McGill career event to tell students about her

organization, the Canadian Centre for International Studies and Co-operation (known by its French acronym CECI), a non-governmental organization involved in international development abroad. Roger, an administrative assistant, hopes to attract three business students to work for CECI this summer.

She said CECI's international partners in development projects are asking for people with management skills. "We have three internships, two in Mali and one in Ecuador," she said. "In Ecuador, the job involves helping to market medicinal plants for sale abroad. The student would help create a network to improve production processes and encourage export. In Mali, we need someone who can create a marketing strategy for Shea butter products. We also need someone to develop fundraising for a women's group there."

While the students are given airfare and a per diem that permits them to live in the country in which they work, there is no salary.

Nevertheless, the CEI anticipates about 400 applications for the 20 internships available.

"There's always been a false assumption that everyone who goes to business school wants to make zillions of dollars," says Jevone Nicholas of CIDA. "But there are also those of us who want to know how the private market works and apply it to good measure."

"The non-profit sector is in real need of managerial professionals. These organizations have a vision and passion to address social problems but they still have to function in a social and legal framework. They still have to know how to balance a ledger and get the trucks to deliver on time."

If last week's event at McGill is anything to go by, there are plenty of students who know how to balance those ledgers and want to put their skills to good measure.