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Just Following Up: My Experience as a Summer Student Administrator for Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP

Bridget Leslie

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Bridget Leslie

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Dr. Barbara Bruce

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Just Following Up: My Experience as a Summer Student Administrator
for Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP

In my first year at Western, I attended a Learning from Experience event in Conron Hall where I watched a few fourth years present their own experiences. I remember that I wanted my experience to be reflective of my future career goals, although I did not know exactly what that meant at the time. I had always been interested in law, so when a job at Osler, Hoskin, & Harcourt LLP became an actual possibility I knew I had to jump at the opportunity. I put myself in the uncomfortable position of contacting someone I did not know at all through email and asking for a job interview. Luckily, this paid off and I was able to interview and eventually got the job. The theme of forcing myself to try new things would be prevalent throughout my entire summer at Osler. Over the summer, I was able to foster personal and professional growth within myself. I gained a multitude of tangible skills, such as proficiency in Kentico, Microsoft Excel, and OnePlace, data analysis with Google Data Studio, as well as social media writing. These skills will undoubtedly benefit me in my future career endeavors, especially if I decide to pursue a job in marketing instead of law. Additionally, I developed soft skills, including professional communication, confidence, and organization. Through various channels such as email, meetings, and presentations, I honed my ability to communicate effectively and assertively while also being friendly and approachable. Overall, my experience at Osler was truly transformative and has equipped me with invaluable skills that will prove beneficial in achieving my career goals.

One of my main tasks at Osler was to update and edit the lawyer biographies on the official company website. This also included management of any requests for biography changes, updating photos, and adding new deals and cases to every lawyer's page. Using a web content managing program called Kentico, I navigated the back end of the website and made many changes over the course of the summer. Through this program, I learned about website upkeep and design. Specifically, I learned the importance of consistent formatting and language. Using professional rhetoric that was in accordance with the firm's style guidelines was essential to my day-to-day tasks. Lawyers would submit a short autobiography to include on the website and these often did not follow the firm's guidelines. In these instances, I would edit their writing to fit the firm's image and then effectively communicate the issues with their submission, explaining which changes I made and why I made them. This helped me further develop my communication skills because I was in a position where I had to critique the writing of other people who were my direct superiors. I was forced to become more comfortable with being critical to others and framing that information in a positive light. Managing lawyer biographies on the Osler website allowed me to gain valuable skills in web content management, professional rhetoric, and communication.

I was also responsible for managing the inbox that contained all requests for lawyer biography changes. In doing so, I effectively communicated with the rest of my team about which changes were completed, waiting for approval, or had not yet been addressed. Communication was essential for this task so that we did not have any overlap in tasks, and everyone was aware of the completion status of each project. This was also an exercise in time management as these changes were expected to be completed in no more than a day. I was also expected to file away all request emails when finished, which taught me how to use the iManage filing system. iManage can be confusing, especially since it is an Outlook program, and I am more comfortable with Google and

Apple programs. Despite this, by the end of the summer, I had become proficient in iManage and had created my own filing system for my inbox and the Lawyer Biography Inbox, which allowed me to easily organize important information for both myself and the rest of my team. Managing the lawyer biography inbox not only required effective communication but also taught me how to use the iManage filing system, allowing me to improve my organizational skills.

Prior to this summer, I had actively avoided using Microsoft Excel. I was intimidated by the program, and I had also been confused when I attempted to use it. However, Excel was integral to many of the tasks I was expected to complete in my role. I used both the firm's intranet sources and YouTube videos to teach myself how to create and manage spreadsheets with multiple columns and pages, use basic formulas, and create graphs that combine multiple sets of data. I designed and produced a spreadsheet detailing the newly formed Crypto Group that will be used for reference throughout the firm. I also created a complex sheet for all the lawyers who were missing photos on our website and regularly updated it with information about the scheduling of their professional headshots. Microsoft Excel was essential to my work on both the French Language Task Force and with Access Privacy. I kept a detailed Excel sheet about the translation status of lawyer biographies on the company website. I also input data into Excel to create a series of graphs and charts which communicated beneficial information about the Access Privacy service. I will expand more on my experiences with the task force and Access Privacy later in this report. Despite my initial hesitation, I taught myself how to use Microsoft Excel and applied this knowledge to various tasks such as data analysis and organization.

My experience in SASAH has given me many opportunities to write in both an academic and creative capacity, but I had not gotten the chance to apply my writing skills to a professional setting until my summer at Osler. I was tasked with writing social media copy for the company's

Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. I also wrote several news items for the Osler website. I incorporated legal and professional rhetoric into my posts which allowed me to explore and build upon my vocabulary. The character limit on Twitter forced me to write more concisely; I became accustomed to summarizing a 200-word news item in only 190 characters. This involved determining the key information from the story that would not only inform readers but also grab their attention. One of my superiors, Jennifer Brown, would assign me to news items and social media copy, so I would send everything to her for review before it was posted. She gave me helpful tips to employ such as using hashtags and industry short forms to conserve space in Tweets—for instance, M&A is widely known in the legal community as Mergers and Acquisitions. I am confident that social media writing is a useful, tangible skill that I can now add to my resume because of this experience.

The marketing team also employed Monday.com as an organizational tool. We had multiple boards where we would organize tasks and projects including the projected date that they would be finished, the main stakeholder, the progress status, and the assigned team members. Monday.com was slightly daunting at first because of the copious items on the boards, but I came to understand that the platform was essential, especially during busy times. The boards indicated the status of every single project we were working on. This was useful because instead of messaging a colleague to check in on a project's status, I would refer to the Monday.com board. At our weekly marketing team meetings, we would go through the main board to ensure that everything was updated and accurate. Being comfortable with Monday.com will be useful to me in the future because many companies use the same service or similar services. The use of Monday.com as an organizational tool proved to be essential for the marketing team, as it helped

to keep track of multiple projects, thereby saving time, and providing a clear overview of progress. It also provided me with a tangible skill that I can apply in the future.

One of the largest undertakings of the summer was the French Language Task Force, of which I was an integral member. The task force was created to address the newly passed Bill 96, which implemented stricter rules regarding the use of the French language within Canadian businesses. The majority of Osler's clients and employees are English speakers, so many pages on the company website were either half-translated or had no French version. Bill 96 states that companies who do business in Québec must provide accurate French translations of almost all content, so the numerous untranslated parts of the website put Osler at risk for severe legal repercussions. My job was to administer the translation of all lawyer biographies, of which there are around 700. I felt very accomplished at the end of the summer because I was able to combine three tangible skills to complete this task: clear communication with the Montréal office, the external translation company, and the rest of the task force, as well as the implementation of the Osler website formatting and my newfound proficiency in Kentico. I would also complete smaller translations myself, which allowed me to incorporate my French degree into my daily tasks. This task force was a significant project that allowed me to use my communicative skills, website formatting, and French translation to help Osler avoid the legal consequences of Bill 96.

The French Language Task Force made me far more confident in my choice to major in French; within the first few months of my job, I was already using my degree daily. Something that I believe many Arts students struggle with is the question of how we are going to take what we are learning in school and use it to get a "real job." I have grappled with this quite often over the past four years and have questioned my own decision many times. I would wonder what would have happened if I had persevered through the parts of science and math that I hated and chosen

to major in nursing or another, more “employable” field. However, the immediate utility of my French knowledge validated my decision to pursue the arts. Furthermore, the skills that I acquired through SASAH were also useful to me this summer. When I would write news items and deal summaries, I would have to extract the most important information from a large body of text. This is a skill that I have developed through years of gleaning information from scholarly journals and other sources. Reading and writing were integral to my daily tasks at Osler, but perhaps more importantly, I applied the communicative skills I have developed through SASAH. The small cohort size in SASAH means that you are in a position where you can communicate to authority figures such as professors and directors. For instance, I recorded a podcast with Jonathan Vickers in third year and have often had casual conversations with my SASAH professors. These interactions made me more comfortable communicating with my superiors at Osler in a casual yet professional manner. In conclusion, my experience in the French Language Task Force reassured me of my decision to major in French and SASAH by providing me with opportunities to use the skills I have learned through my degree.

The French Language Task Force involved monthly meetings where we would discuss our progress, recent policy changes, and any other pressing issues. I was in charge of administering the bio translation process, so I would frequently speak during these meetings. At the beginning, there were several logistical problems that I had to address in a meeting with several of my superiors, many of whom I had never spoken to before. I was nervous, but I found that the best approach was to clearly communicate the issue and not be afraid to take up too much time. I have the tendency to cut myself off before I have conveyed all my thoughts when I speak in an environment that I am not comfortable in. This often works against me because I will be subject to clarifying questions, or the conversation will carry on with everyone having misunderstood my

point. Before these meetings, I reflected on this behaviour of mine and decided that I would work to change. I made a conscious choice to not worry about speaking for too long, and to keep the floor until I had made my entire point. After the first meeting I found that most everyone was receptive to my opinions and that I had no reason to feel insecure in the first place. I found that my opinions and concerns were well received by my superiors. In summary, through effective communication and willingness to speak up, I successfully addressed logistical problems and contributed valuable insight to the French Language Task Force.

In addition to verbal, face-to-face communication, I also improved upon written communication. The vast quantity of emails I wrote this summer forced me to become very comfortable and proficient with this mode of communication, especially when it came to communicating with my superiors. I have always struggled to write formal emails, but my summer at Osler allowed me to practice this skill frequently. The ability to communicate effectively over email will be very useful to me in the coming years, as I will have to reach out to previous professors and managers for reference letters. Furthermore, the importance of email communication was illustrated to me early in the summer when I met with a corporate partner, Karin Sachar. Karin informed me that a large portion of a lawyer's day is devoted to emailing clients and colleagues. Another aspect of professional communication that I was able to improve upon was my timing of emails and messages—for instance, an email sent out at the end of the day on Friday is likely to get lost in the Monday morning shuffle. I quickly understood that people can be forgetful, so I kept track of which emails I needed to follow-up on by tagging them with a specific colour. I also learned how to strike a balance between being assertive in my follow-ups rather than bothersome. Navigating professional communication was not something I had given too much thought to before my internship, but this ended up being an essential part of my job; a

messy inbox created a feeling of distress that can easily disrupt other tasks. My internship at Osler provided valuable opportunities to improve my communication skills, particularly with emails, and to understand the importance of effective timing and following-up in professional communication.

Osler owns several products and services that are marketed toward business professionals and owners. One of these services is Access Privacy, which helps corporations understand privacy law and stay up to date with new policies. Adam Kardash, the leading privacy lawyer in Canada and founder of Access Privacy, holds a monthly conference call with all clients to discuss recent policy changes and privacy related information. I was tasked with analyzing the data from these calls and putting together a cumulative presentation which would summarize the data and make recommendations accordingly. The website data was available to me through Google Data Studio, so I had to familiarize myself with this program. I began by making general notes and inferences: we had been underutilizing key resources such as LinkedIn and email newsletters, our audience was primarily interested in general information that was applicable to their own businesses, and the areas of the website that were most resource exhaustive were not receiving adequate traffic. Using Microsoft Excel, I created graphs and charts that demonstrated my inferences and put together some opinion-based recommendations. I suggested that we send out a bi-weekly or monthly email newsletter that highlights some of the less popular (but resource intensive) areas of the website and that if this is not effective, we re-evaluate the value of these parts of the website. This process taught me hard skills such as creating graphs on Excel and data analysis, but soft skills such as perseverance and critical thinking. The process of data analysis was extremely time consuming and required patience; I had to glean through dozens of documents, charts, and email replies to create the basis for my analysis. I then critically examined this data and decided what its

implications were, and how I could make recommendations based on this information. The analysis of the Access Privacy monthly conference calls provided valuable insights into the aspects of the business that could be improved and allowed me to develop both hard and soft skills.

Once I had finished my analysis of the Access Privacy calls and website data, I had to present this information during a monthly team meeting. The presentation was daunting for multiple reasons: I had never done any sort of data analysis before, I was giving recommendations to the leading privacy lawyer in Canada based on my own opinion and analysis, and I would have the floor in an important meeting of executives for 10-15 minutes. However, the support and guidance from my superiors, particularly Shannon and Stephanie, helped me feel more comfortable giving this presentation. Shannon took me under her wing this summer and made me feel extremely welcome; she gave me helpful pointers and tips that applied to both life at Osler and working life in general. It was also her idea to give me this task, which was flattering because none of the other interns were given anything similar. Despite my nerves, the presentation went very well. Adam and the rest of the team were very receptive to my ideas, and I felt that I made a genuine impact at the firm. I consider this presentation to be the highlight of the summer because of the challenges I overcame and the validation I felt knowing that it was successful.

In a few weeks, it will have been exactly a year since I started my internship. Several months have passed since I last reflected on my experience at Osler, so this presentation gave me the opportunity to evaluate how my internship has impacted me daily, on both a personal and professional level. My personal life was much different back then: I had just gotten out of a toxic relationship, and I had inadvertently isolated myself from friends, so I spent the summer trying to rebuild past friendships and grow new ones. In many ways, my job at Osler helped me do this; I made specific connections through the company, and I was instilled with a newfound confidence.

One of my fellow interns, Alyssa, became a good friend of mine over the summer. I also made friends with Shannon, which was almost like having an older sister because she taught me about Toronto and gave me advice about dating and friendships. In the past, I have always been a person to eat alone and keep to myself during lunch breaks or free time because I was so worried that eating with someone I did not know would be awkward. This summer though I realized that the only correct answer to the question of “what if it’s awkward?” is “what if it’s not?” Putting myself in this mindset allowed me to branch out and make many new friends that I would not have otherwise made, such as Shannon and Alyssa. There were also several times when it actually *was* quite awkward, but I got through these times anyway, so I realized that there was really no point in being so anxious in the first place. This mindset has honestly improved my life in so many ways—I have more friends, and I have deeper connections with the friends I already had. Furthermore, if I want to be successful in life, I cannot turn away relationships and connections just because I might feel uncomfortable. Connections lead to new opportunities that you would not otherwise receive. For instance, Shannon would not have given me the Access Privacy presentation if I did not foster a good working and personal relationship with her. Overall, creating my experiential learning presentation allowed me to reflect on how my internship helped me grow professionally, but also personally by providing opportunities to make new connections and develop a newfound confidence in social situations.

I began the process of creating my presentation by reviewing the goals I had set for myself at the beginning of the summer to see if I had achieved them. My first goal was to develop personally and professionally, which is pretty broad, but I do feel that I was able to complete this with the hard and soft skills I have acquired. I achieved my second goal of learning about a legal career by speaking with partners at the firm, including Karin Sachar. During our meeting, she

discussed the details of her day-to-day life as a lawyer, as well as how she balances her family and career. After my meeting with her, I was confident that I could work in law while still having a family, which is something that I was concerned about. My job in the marketing department made me aware of just how essential marketing is to a successful legal career; lawyers must use accolades, industry recognition, and positive press to their advantages and it is really quite competitive. While the competitive nature of marketing in the legal industry is somewhat daunting to me, I believe that I am capable of effectively promoting myself if necessary. Although I wasn't able to decide which legal practice area I would like to pursue, I learned that most people make this decision during law school when they are Summer Students or Articling Students. My last goal for this summer was to make meaningful connections, which I believe that I did successfully. I have connected with almost everyone from the marketing department on LinkedIn and I feel comfortable reaching out to them for anything I need. In conclusion, I successfully completed my goals of personal and professional development, learning about a legal career, and making meaningful connections.

During my presentation, I unfortunately did not get a chance to talk about the key takeaways of my internship. Most importantly, I wanted to emphasize the fact that people truly want to hear what you have to say and are interested in your ideas. I understand that this is not always true and that I was fortunate to be in a position where my ideas, as a summer intern, were valued. However, I wanted to emphasize the point that, despite your title at a company, you should still speak up and discuss any ideas you have; people might initially underestimate you, so you need to have the confidence to make yourself heard. I learned quickly that this was the right way to get ahead and have people consider you for unique opportunities that can advance your career. Additionally, a functional team does not exclude people based on their "status" and will ideally be

receptive to anyone as long as they are enthusiastic, intelligent, and communicative. If I could do my presentation again, I would have budgeted more time to emphasize the importance of sharing ideas regardless of one's position, as this can lead to unique opportunities for career advancement. I also would have stressed the importance of a team that values creativity, intelligence, and enthusiasm.

My presentation also highlighted one area that I still need to work on, which is answering questions that I am not prepared for. During my presentation, I mentioned how I was often asked to administer translations and how my French degree was already becoming relevant in my work life. Michael Milde asked me a question that I did not fully understand. I thought he was asking why they would have asked me to translate given my relatively low position in the company, but I was not entirely sure. In hindsight, I should have just asked for clarification, but I decided to answer what I thought he was asking. However, since I did not fully understand the question, I went on a tangent and talked about the importance of having a second language and how SASAH's language requirement has been an asset to me. I also mentioned how overworked the official translation department was and how we had to hire an external company. I felt that I had gone off-topic, and that this could have been avoided had I simply asked for clarification from the Dean. I see this as a learning experience, and I now know that it is better to be sure of what someone is asking you rather than just guessing. This seems like common sense, but I am still working on not getting intimidated by superiors. As Michael Milde is the Dean of my faculty, I was nervous to ask him for clarification. While I feel that my internship at Osler has helped me become more confident, this experience demonstrated that I still have progress to make.

Watching the other presentations gave me a unique perspective on my own experience. For instance, Kirat's presentation made me thankful that I had superiors to answer to on a daily basis

because I could see myself neglecting deadlines if I was in charge of my own progress. I was particularly impacted by Ahsif's presentation for several reasons: I enjoyed his casual yet still professional style of presenting, I was interested to see what the Forest City Film Festival was like because I have been receiving emails about it for years, and the negative parts of his experience reminded me of what could have happened with my own EL. At the beginning of third year, I was connected with an organization called Internet Sense First because I wanted to help victims of human trafficking. Since I am very passionate about this cause, I was disappointed by the organization and made the choice to end our working relationship. My manager did not seem to understand the goals of SASAH's Experiential Learning program and seemed to view me as a free labourer who would amass a vast social media following for her with no resources, direction, or guidance. She implied that she would not sign off on my credit if I was not successful in this. I felt that continuing to work with her would be stressful and counterproductive, so I decided to end it and keep looking for a better fit, which eventually came around with Osler. The way that Ahsif described working with Forest City, particularly with the tokenization of minorities, reminded me of the way that my manager talked about victims of human trafficking as props that we could use in our marketing. Overall, his presentation made me so thankful that I decided to keep looking when my first EL was not a good fit for me.

My role as Summer Student Administrator at Osler, Hoskin, & Harcourt LLP fostered personal and professional growth within me. I gained tangible skills such as proficiency in Kentico, Microsoft Excel, and OnePlace, data analysis with Google Data Studio, as well as social media writing for Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. I will be able to carry these skills with me through my future career endeavors and they will be useful in case I decide to pursue a job in marketing instead of law. I also developed soft skills such as professional communication, confidence, and

organization. I communicated through emails to my direct superiors, coworkers, and lawyers throughout the firm, striking a balance between being professional, friendly, and assertive. Furthermore, I was able to effectively communicate in person and virtually during meetings where I would share my ideas and participate with confidence. My presentation skills were also put to the test that summer when I was tasked with presenting my own data analysis for Access Privacy to a group of executives led by Adam Kardash, the top privacy lawyer in Canada. Not only did I make valuable personal and professional connections this summer, I also became more comfortable with the idea of spending time with people I do not know well and trying to build new connections. My experience at Osler allowed me to acquire both tangible and intangible skills and helped me develop greater confidence and professional communication abilities, all of which will be invaluable as I pursue my future career goals.