



WORK LEARN | WINTER 2024



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During the final year of my undergraduate studies, I actively explored career opportunities aligned with my academic interests while also considering potential graduate programs. I came across the MGEM Program Assistant position through UBC's CareersOnline platform. Having completed coursework in remote sensing and geographic information systems (GIS), and with prior experience as a campus ambassador where I developed skills in event planning, outreach, and communication, I felt well-prepared for the role. More importantly, I saw this opportunity as a way to gain firsthand insight into the MGEM program, helping me make a more informed decision about whether to apply for the master's program. After working as a Program Assistant for five months and gaining a deeper understanding of the

program's structure and community, I ultimately decided to pursue a graduate degree with MGEM.

While working as an MGEM Program Assistant, I relied on early planning and flexible adjustments to balance my work and academic responsibilities. My main tasks included organizing career events, updating the program's resource website, and collecting student feedback. Some tasks required coordinating with students and faculty, while others could be scheduled independently. I prioritized time-sensitive tasks that involved collaboration, such as finalizing event schedules and reaching out to GIS professionals, and reserved weekends with lighter academic loads for independent tasks like website updates.

During particularly busy periods, such as midterm exams, I would proactively communicate with my supervisor, Dr. Kathleen Coupland, to explain any scheduling conflicts and either request deadline adjustments or complete tasks in advance. Dr. Coupland was very supportive and understanding, often helping me rearrange tasks based on my academic workload. This flexibility allowed me to maintain a strong commitment to both my studies and my responsibilities as a Program Assistant, for which I remain very grateful.

This experience taught me the importance of cross-departmental and cross-role communication. While organizing the MGEM career event, I regularly communicated with external GIS professionals, program supervisors, and internal faculty members to coordinate logistics and align expectations. This multi-stakeholder coordination allowed me to apply concepts I had studied in natural resource management, particularly effective stakeholder communication strategies.

Additionally, by curating and sharing job and conference opportunities with students, I gained a deeper understanding of GIS applications in the real world, industry trends, and future career paths. This



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process sharpened my skills in information curation, data organization, and user-centered communication. Managing the MGEM Instagram account and promoting events such as the Capstone Project Poster Session strengthened my abilities in content design and outreach strategy. Together, these experiences have equipped me with valuable skills that will support both my future academic pursuits and professional career development.

For students interested in applying for a Work Learn position, I would recommend choosing a role that aligns with your interests and long-term goals. Strong time management skills are essential—planning ahead and staying flexible can make a big difference. I also encourage open communication: don't hesitate to seek help from supervisors or colleagues when needed, and provide regular updates to keep projects moving smoothly. Having a supportive supervisor can make a significant difference as well. I was fortunate to work under the guidance of Dr. Kathleen Coupland, who was always understanding of my academic commitments and helped me adjust my tasks accordingly. This experience taught me that clear communication and mutual respect are key to balancing work and studies effectively.

Most importantly, treat every task, no matter how small, as a valuable opportunity to develop new skills. Whether it's organizing events, managing information, or collaborating with different groups, these experiences build a strong foundation for both academic and career success. Keeping an open mind and a willingness to learn will make your Work Learn experience especially rewarding.