

## Innovative Web Site Helps Grads Get Jobs

**Andrea Nemetz**

**Shely Henry** thinks about getting a job constantly.

The second-year MLIS student at Dalhousie University in Halifax will be graduating in May and plans to return to Calgary, where she spent last summer working at the National Energy Board. She also has four and a half years of experience at the *Calgary Sun* library.

"I'm not just concerned about getting a job, but with getting a job that I will enjoy. It's really important to like what you're doing," says Henry, who earned a degree in English literature and a diploma in broadcast journalism before embarking on a library career.

With just over two months until the end of classes, finding a job also weighs heavily on Jennifer Trainor, who came to the MLIS program with a background in publishing, television and film. Trainor, who spent last summer working as a reference intern at Dalhousie's Killam Library, is interested in pursuing a career beyond a traditional library job, perhaps in a corporate or non-library setting. The portability and flexibility of the degree, and the ability to work throughout North America or abroad in a huge variety of settings, helped attract the English grad to Dalhousie's School of Library and Information Studies.

Both see Prospectus, a new web site that showcases graduating students, as an exciting tool in their job search process.

Prospectus is a searchable site containing biographical information, photos, résumés, lists of courses taken and, in some cases, examples of published papers or multimedia or digital library projects, for 31 students in the class of 2004. Prospective employers can search the group as a whole, select only those students who wish to work in a certain geographic location (Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies, West Coast, the North, USA, outside North America or teleworkers) or those who wish to work in a specific professional area (academic, public, corporate or special libraries, archives or non-library settings). Information is in PDF format so it can be easily printed.

Coordinated by five students, Prospectus (the name was chosen because they liked the definition and its old-world feel) is part of a project aimed at helping soon-to-be graduates with their job search by pooling ideas about résumé writing and leads on positions.

The idea took root more than a year ago over a few drinks in a pub, says project originator Steve Lelievre, a U.K. native who arrived in Canada in 1999 with a degree in applied

physics and electronics and nearly 20 years of experience in the computer industry.

"We were talking about what we were going to do after we finished and how we would go about getting jobs, the different channels people go through, putting ads in local papers, email lists, and how we could track it. We thought if we could exchange information, background on advertised jobs, it would be a win-win for everyone," says Lelievre, who was responsible for the easy-to-navigate site's technical design, including writing the JavaScript that governs the search facility and associated database.

"We've tried to consider all the things that are taught in human-computer interaction, the metadata, to make it as accessible as possible," Lelievre continues. "We also have a plain-text version, so we account for user preferences. The personal pages have been left up to users to show what best represents the work they've been doing."

M.J. D'Elia, whose undergraduate degree, from the University of Western Ontario, is in visual arts and English, was responsible for the site's attractive visual design, created with Macromedia Dreamweaver MX, Flash 5 and Adobe Photoshop 6. Elizabeth Millar and Francesca Frati

co-wrote the content, while Julia Stewart took the lead in promoting the project, which has about a 90% participation rate (some students already had jobs lined up or elected not to take part).

"It was a cooperative effort, very student-run," explains D'Elia, who is leaning toward a career in academic librarianship or library marketing and promotion. "This project seems to be consistent with the values of the profession. We share ideas and try to help patrons. The project is evidence of this cooperation. We're not all interested in working in the same library, or in the same city, but we can get together to help with job searches and résumé writing. We have a lot of quality grads and this can help us get our name out. I'm pleased with the buy-in from the rest of the class."

A deadline of the end of January was set for students to finish their résumé packages, giving many an early start to their job search. "To get our class thinking about the job hunt is a step in itself," says D'Elia, who also designed unique library profession T-shirts that have drawn orders from around the world.

Henry, who has posted a bio and résumé, is excited about the project and believes there is power in numbers. "The Web site has really made me try to think early about what a prospective employer might want. I know engineering and law firms go to the schools to recruit students, and I think if an organization needs information professionals this site is a great way to come to our library school and recruit people."

Trainor says Prospectus is an excellent showcase for the individual talents and interests of the graduating class. "In the field we're in, a web presence is essential. It's a nice opportunity to showcase everyone's talent. Aside from my résumés, bio and list of courses, I have a link to a digital library prototype I did for Mount Saint Vincent University. I think everything helps – this is a very competitive field. It's also convenient for employers to go and look at the site at their leisure."


D'Elia notes that art classes post portfolios online and MBA classes often have Web sites with résumés, but believes the site is fairly unusual in the library community. "I think it's an excellent way to promote us, to promote the school and to promote the profession."

Dr. Fiona Black, the acting director of Dalhousie's School of Library and Information Studies, says the site is a wonderful, innovative way for members of a graduating class to collaborate on their job searches. And she is impressed by the site's clear design and the fact that students are showing initiative in a very pragmatic way. "As information professionals, we are always looking for ways to organize and present information that allows appropriate access, and this particular site not only may help some individuals gain a position, but promotes a diverse group of new grads."

Dr. Black notes that some recent graduates have been asked if they have classmates who might be willing to

apply for positions, and the site will give those employers a way to see other members of the class. "One of the other benefits of the site is to allow those considering a career in library and information sciences to see the range of skills and identity of the student population. It's also an excellent way to support the school's already strong profile further afield," she adds.

Dalhousie's School of Library and Information Studies is hosting the page, and Lelievre said there are plans for email promotion of the site, promotional mailouts, and the creation of bookmarks and flyers to pass out at conferences.

D'Elia and Lelievre are enthusiastic, not just about the final product, but about what they've learned while working on Prospectus. "I definitely learned about project management," laughs Lelievre, whose background includes work in systems analysis. D'Elia notes the teamwork went well. "We used all the lessons learned about how we work in groups (a big part of library school). We all felt strongly about certain things, but we resolved differences of opinion and compromised." 

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