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GRO The Forum

Environmental Protection Agency Greater Research Opportunities (GRO) Undergraduate Student Fellowships Newsletter Issue 1, 2005

Porche Spence: An Alumni Profile

Porche Spence a 2000-2001 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) fellow was encouraged to apply to the EPA Greater Research Opportunities (GRO) Undergraduate Student Fellowship Program by a professor at North Carolina Central University. As this fellowship would be an opportunity to receive money for school and work for an agency such as the EPA, Porche knew that this was an opportunity that she could not pass up.

In the summer of 2000, Porche interned with the EPA in Atlanta, GA, in the Waste Management Division. Porche's summer project was investigating the effects of chemicals in groundwater on health. On this project she was exposed to site assessments that looked at groundwater and soil exposure and the efforts toward cleanup, wrote articles on a variety of environmental justice issues, developed a database of environmental justice issues, developed a database of environmental justice media contacts, and was able to participate in a region-

al enforcement strategy meeting, where the focus was on "Wetlands Violations of the Clean Water Act."

As part of her internship experience, Porche was given the opportunity to travel to Anniston, AL. Anniston, AL, grew to fame in 2000, when more than 3,000 citizens of Anniston filed a class action suit against Monsanto for damages allegedly caused by releases of PCBs into the area's air, lakes, rivers, and soil. These citizens allege that the company knew it was releasing PCBs into the atmosphere, knew the hazards that accompanied exposure to PCBs and, consequently, did nothing to stop the discharges and did not take the appropriate measures to protect those living in Anniston. While in Anniston, Porche (who has asthma) experienced a small part of what the residents in Anniston contended with. While in Anniston, Porche's asthma was exacerbated, and she found it very hard to breathe. There was a horrible stench



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A Fellow's Summer Project: EPA's Office of Science and Technology

The Office of Science and Technology (OST) is responsible for developing sound, scientifically defensible standards, criteria, advisories, guidelines, limitations, and standards under the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. OST also is responsible for developing risk assessment methodologies and providing risk assessment support for the Office of Water in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. These products articulate the goals and provide the regulatory framework for restoring and maintaining the biological, chemical, and physical integrity of the nation's water resources, for protecting the nation's public water supplies, and for achieving technology-based, pollution-control requirements.

The three Divisions that make up OST—Engineering and Analysis Division, Health and Ecological Criteria Division, and Standards and Health Protection Division—are committed to protecting human health and the environment by carrying out research on the effects of pollutants that are discharged into our nation's surface waters. They focus on such diverse programs as technology-based controls and pollution-prevention techniques for industrial dischargers, human health and environmental risks, risk assessments, and state water quality standards.

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It's a Whole New World Out There. Are You Ready?

Do your future plans include a steady job, a clear career path, regular pay raises, good benefits, and some sense of job security? If employers take Bruce Tulgan's advice, a lot of these things will be designed out of the workplace. It might be time to think about "Plan B."

Tulgan is the President of Rainmaker Thinking, Inc., and the author of *Winning the Talent Wars* (WW Norton, 2001). He advises employers on how to build a workforce for the 21st Century. The essence of his message is that companies, agencies, and organizations need to create an entirely new relationship with workers—one that will involve only a small core group of permanent employees.

Here's what he's saying to employers:

1. **Talent is the show.** One great person is worth a whole bunch of mediocre people.
2. **Staff the work, not the jobs.** Create a giant, fluid talent pool, and you can let your core

group of traditional employees shrink to a small fraction of its current size.

3. **Pay for performance, nothing else.** Stop paying long-term salaries and start negotiating with employees the way purchasing agents do business with outside vendors.
4. **Train for the mission, not for the long haul.** Get people up to speed, boot camp style, and fill skill and knowledge gaps as they occur.

Are you ready for a free agent nation? Are you the "one great person" employers are looking for? Do you think you would prosper financially at a place that "pays for performance—nothing else?" Can you imagine a world in which most people have lots of work to do, but don't hold a traditional job?

Whether or not most employers actually follow Tulgan's advice, it would be wise to plan for the possibility. Consider using internships, part-time jobs, volunteer experiences, even class projects as "practice fields" for your involvement in the new economy.

How might that work?

First, try to forget about hourly wages. Pretend that you will only get paid when you complete a "deliverable" (e.g., a document, an event, a map, a recommendation, an agreement, whatever).

Second, get clear about what your deliverables are, how they will be measured, and when they are due.

Third, deliver the goods in high-quality fashion, on time and under "budget." Make sure that the final product is even better than what was expected.

Fourth, get the training you need as you go along. When possible, train yourself.

Fifth, keep a careful record of your deliverables, and build a portfolio of your successes. As the number of jobs decline, professional portfolios (examples of actual work) are likely to replace resumes (lists of past jobs) for many professionals. 

A Fellow's Summer Project: EPA's Office of Water, Region 9 Water Division

The Office of Water (OW) is responsible for implementing the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act, and portions of the:

- Coastal Zone Act Reauthorization Amendments of 1990,
- Resource Conservation and Recovery Act,
- Ocean Dumping Ban Act,
- Marine Protection,
- Research and Sanctuaries Act,
- Shore Protection Act,
- Marine Plastics Pollution Research and Control Act,
- London Dumping Convention, and the International Convention for the

Prevention of Pollution from Ships and several other statutes.

Our activities are targeted to prevent pollution wherever possible and to reduce risk for people and ecosystems in the most cost-effective ways possible.

The job is much too big to accomplish alone. OW staff depend on many others, including the 10 EPA Regions, other federal agencies, state and local governments, Indian tribes, the regulated community, organized professional and interest groups, land owners and managers, and the public-at-large. OW often provides guidance, specifies scientific methods and data collection requirements, performs oversight, and facilitates communication among those involved. As soon as OW and regional staff have helped the states and Indian tribes to build the capacity, many water programs are delegated to them for implementation.

Since EPA was established in 1970, the Agency and country have made great progress in improving surface water quality and ensuring safe drinking water. Under the provisions of the Clean Water Act, the nation invested over \$75 billion to construct municipal sewage treatment facilities, nearly doubling the number of people served with secondary treatment to almost 150 million.

The Water Division at EPA Region 9, San Francisco, implements the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act for Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, several Pacific Island nations, and more than 145 Tribal Nations in the desert Southwest. Being a large, densely populated but arid region puts added stress on our limited water resources.

This summer, Amy Miller of EPA's Region 9 Water Division will be mentoring Joseph

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in the air, and during her time in Anniston she did not see any animals; not even a bird.

During her internship, Porche was working on her Bachelors of Science in Environmental Science, with a concentration in Biology. Her undergraduate work had prepared her for the research side of environmental policy, but doing this internship for the summer enabled her to see how research is turned into policy. She was able to see first-hand how policy is applied in the form of industry regulations and then enforced by the EPA.

Going into the internship, Porche had no expectations, but she was aware that you get

out of the experience what you put into it. Porche had a great experience working for the EPA that summer. It helped her gain a better sense of what she wanted to do and the role she wanted to play in working with the environment.

Porche attained her BS in Environmental Science from North Carolina Central University in May of 2001, and in the fall of 2001 she returned to work on her Master of Science degree in Earth Science, which she completed in May of 2003. Porche also had 2 to 3 other internships with the EPA before being hired as an EPA contractor in 2003.



2004-2005 GRO Fellowship Class Summer Placement

Ten undergraduate students make up the 2004-2005 GRO Fellowship Class. ECO and the EPA are happy to welcome these talented students for the 2005 summer program.

Erin Englert

Louisiana State University

Major: Environmental Engineering

This summer, Erin will be working with Louisiana State University's Hazardous Substance Research Center, a center funded by EPA.

Joseph Guido

University of North Dakota

Major: Chemical Engineering

This summer, Joseph will be working with EPA's Region 9 Water Division.

Krystal Hamlett

Lincoln University

Major: Cell and Molecular Biology

This summer, Krystal will be working with EPA's Region 3 Office of Watersheds.

Clancy Kadrmas

University of North Dakota

Major: Chemical Engineering

This summer, Clancy will be working with EPA's Region 9 Superfund Division.

Megan Killian

Towson University

Major: Environmental Science

This summer, Megan will be working in EPA's Region 1 Atlantic Ecology Division.

Wendy Lucero

University of California, Santa Cruz

Major: Environmental Chemistry

This summer, Wendy will be working in EPA's Region 2 Microbiology Lab.

Megan Mauter

Rice University

Major: Civil and Environmental Engineering

This summer, Megan will be working at EPA Headquarters Office of Policy Economics and Innovation.

Mia Robbins

Xavier University

Major: Biology

This summer, Mia will be working in EPA's Region 4 Air Pesticides and Toxics Management Division.

Shaka Rucker

Phoenix College

Major: Economics

This summer, Shaka will be working at EPA Headquarters Office of Science and Technology.

Kathryn Semmens

Ursinus College

Major: Environmental Studies

This summer, Kathryn will be working in EPA's Region 3 Environmental Assessment and Innovation Division.



This summer, Treda Smith and William Swietlik of the Health and Ecological Criteria Division will be working with Shaka Rucker, one of our 2004-2005 GRO recipients from Phoenix College. Shaka will be working with the Chemical Criteria program and will be given several specific opportunities to participate in EPA activities related to the development, derivation, and implementation of chemical criteria to protect aquatic life.

William Swietlik and the Health and Ecological Criteria Division are no strangers to the EPA Fellows summer program. In the summer of 2002, EPA Fellow Brandon Peebles, a Marine and



Brandon Peebles

Environmental Science major from Hampton University, spent his summer internship with Bill in the Health and Ecological Criteria Division.



Guido (2004-2005 GRO Fellowship Recipient) from the University of North Dakota. Joseph's summer project will allow him to gain knowledge in public policy and regulatory implementation. Through information review and case development, Joseph will gain an understanding of the data needed to make a defensible case and the legal process the Agency must use to take enforcement actions. Joseph will travel with an inspector to regulated sites and experience first-hand the environmental issues facing the Region 9 area.

Joseph will be moving to the San Francisco area with fellow University of North Dakota 2004-2005 fellowship recipient Clancy Kadrmas. Clancy will be working with Michael Gill and Michael Montgomery of EPA's Region 9 Superfund Division. Clancy's summer project will be working to encourage renewable energy at Waste Clean-up sites.





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Contrarian Advice for Career Fair Attendees

Career fairs are the perfect place to distribute your resume, right? Not necessarily. Try this strategy and see if you don't have better results.

First, make a circuit of the career fair and gather written information from employers that interest you. Find a quiet place to read this material quickly, identifying projects and programs that sound intriguing, and write down questions.

Second, go back to the booths that interest you and ask questions that reference the materials you just read. You'll be demonstrating that you're the type of person who does their homework and is seriously interested in the employer. Also, ask about key future challenges facing the employer. Where do their problems and opportunities lie? Finally, ask if there is a "type" of person who tends to succeed best at this firm or agency. What kind of person are they looking for?

Third, ask the recruiter about his or her personal experience with the employer. Why does she

work there? What does she like? How did she get her job?

Fourth, be sure to get a business card!

Fifth, go home and think about all you've learned.

Sixth, adjust your resume to fit the needs and interests of the employers that most interested you.

Seventh, send your adjusted resumes to the recruiters you met. In your own cover letter, mention the conversation you had and say something about the interaction that stuck with you. Be personal. Point out that you've written a resume that relates directly to that employer and enclosed it.

Eighth, follow up within a few days to talk about opportunities.

Career fairs are about meeting people—not dropping off pieces of paper. Good luck! 

"Cyah Says"

Porche Spence realized early in her internship that the experience was going to be what she made of it. Your internship Project Advisor and/or Mentor, aside from having you complete your assigned project, wants you to enjoy your internship experience. Often, there are downtimes in an internship. It is your responsibility to take the initiative in these downtimes to fill your time in useful ways. My suggestion is that you take time to research your agency and find out what other kinds of projects are being worked on. Most of the time, this information can be found on the agency's Web site. When you find a project you are interested in, take the time to talk to your mentor/advisor about the possibility of using your downtime to volunteer your services to that project. By taking this kind of initiative, you are declaring to your agency that you are a creative problem solver; and, by working on several projects, you will learn new skill sets that may help you gain your next internship or entrance into graduate school. 