

Name: Robin Mann

Home institution: Mount Saint Vincent University

International CO-OP destination (city, country): Barcelona, Cataluña, Spain

Travel dates: August-December 2010

Work term (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.): 2nd



1. Why were you interested in an international work term?

After studying in Barcelona (2008-2009), I was motivated to return and continue studying the culture and language. I also realized the benefits that international exposure can have; this was a real incentive to seek out an international experience.

2. How did you fund the travel costs and other expenses for the term?

I was fortunate enough to stay with relatives during my first CO-OP work term, so I had few expenses. After living modestly during the summer while I was taking courses, I was able to personally fund my travel and living expenses.

3. Can you tell me what steps you took to secure your CO-OP position? Was it a difficult process? What advice do you have for other students?

It was a task to ensure that everything with my position would coordinate with the CO-OP Office, but I didn't encounter any serious obstacles. I was motivated to keep in constant contact with the foreign employer just to display my interest. I informed them of all the documents needed to secure CO-OP Office approval and to get a working visa. Luckily, I did not run into any unfortunate circumstances.

I would advise other students to stay on top of the necessary documents and maintain a steady flow of communication to make sure everyone is aware of what is going on so that there are no unexpected surprises.

- 4. When conducting your job search did you find that many of the jobs available were in specific sectors (such as corporate, non-profit, government, etc.)? Where, or how, would you suggest other students focus their search?**

I conducted my search through many sources and considered many positions in all sectors. There are reliable resources through the Government of Canada that filter companies and sectors. I would recommend that students consult the information provided on the federal government website; from there, they can research a sector and find more companies in that sector. The website is www.campusaccess.com/internships/canadian-government.html. It has great resources for public, private and NGO internships. I also used www.loquo.com, which is specifically for Spanish postings, and that's where I found my last position.

- 5. Tell me about the cost of living in (city or country). How did your expenses compare with the salary you were earning? Were you able to save any money? Where did you find savings or discounts to reduce your expenses?**

Because I was in the center of a big city, it was no surprise that the cost of living was higher compared to a small city. My salary was not enough to cover all of my expenses, so I had to rely on my savings for the majority of my expenses.

- 6. How did you find accommodations and how much rent should students expect to pay in (city or country)?**

I found the accommodation very good. I had no trouble finding an affordable place to stay that was in a great location with a great roommate. I was paying 300 euro per month (CAD \$414), which was a reasonable rate considering the condition and location.

- 7. What, if any, cultural barriers did you have to overcome?**

The major barrier was the language. However, having been exposed to the language for several years prior, I didn't find it overwhelming. I had no problem communicating and socializing, but I can see that it would be an issue had I not known the local language.

- 8. Did you find it difficult to meet new people? What steps did you take to integrate yourself into your new surroundings and make yourself more comfortable in your new setting?**

I didn't find it very difficult to meet people. I was fortunate enough to have studied in the same area a year before, so I maintained contact with the people that I had met when I was there. However, I also joined social clubs called *intercambios*, where locals and foreigners meet at a bar or pub to chat in English/Spanish over

a couple of appetizers and drinks. It is a very interesting way to meet new people who have common interests.

9. Overall, what advice would you give CO-OP students who are seeking international opportunities?

I would advise students to make sure that they are well prepared and to stay positive. It's also important to visit job-posting sites frequently to check for new opportunities, because you never know what might suddenly appear.

10. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience?

I would just like to say that my past internship was a great experience. Not only did I learn new skills needed for my position, but also I learned about myself, and how I interact with different people from different places. I feel that I have matured a lot over the course of this process, and have made friends and memories that will last a long time.