

Math students crack job market

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It doesn't take a mathematician to figure out that work experience plus an education equals a job.

And math graduates in B.C. now have an opportunity to test that formula.

The B.C. government committed \$100,000 to place 10 student interns into businesses in B.C.

The math internship program is managed by Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems (MITACS), a network of university researchers and companies. Since 2003, MITACS has recruited 45 math interns to address high-level research issues for companies using mathematics.

Kiran Kumar, a University of Victoria electrical engineering student started his four-month internship in May.

"I was graduating in June and I knew I had to be looking for a job opportunity," said Kumar, who defended his graduate thesis in June. "And if you're looking in Victoria - it's not as easy as Vancouver or Toronto."

Kumar was hired by Carmanah Technologies Corporation, a B.C.-based business. During his internship he used numerical stimulations and optimization techniques to improve solar-based transit and roadway signs.

"It was a good foot in the door," he said. "Now they've offered me a three-month contract."

Dr. Arvind Gupta, the scientific director of MITACS, says internships open new employment opportunities.

"No longer is the choice for math graduates to either become professors or move south of the border to greener pastures," said Gupta.

Other graduates have worked for organizations such as B.C. Hydro, Telus, Ballard Power Systems and the Vancouver Aquarium.

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Funding for math interns

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The B.C. government made a \$100,000 funding announcement Sept. 22, which it said in a press release will benefit graduate students in mathematical sciences by moving them out of the classroom and into the workforce for more hands-on experience.

"No longer is the choice for math graduates to either become professors or move south of the border to greener pastures," said Dr. Arvind Gupta, scientific director of Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems (MITACS), which manages the math internship program based at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby.

"Through the support of the B.C. government, and local organizations and businesses, we're providing math graduates with an unprecedented chance to use their skills in the workforce, to shed a different light on complex problems than traditional disciplines and make important contributions to the Canadian economy."

Under the MITACS internship program, graduate students spend about half of a four month-period at a company, researching a problem identified by the business, MITACS and the student's professors. The other half is spent at the university, further advancing their research.

Math students across the province have contributed to a number of projects, including estimating salmon survival rates in the Pacific Ocean and improving medical imaging techniques of the brain to provide better treatment for multiple sclerosis patients.

Gupta said 10 more students will benefit from the new funding boost - the province has already injected \$300,000 into the internship program. The program has already helped bring about 45 students into B.C. businesses, such as the Vancouver Aquarium, BC Hydro and TELUS.

"These internships facilitate the transfer of research and innovative processes to industry, further improving B.C.'s international competitiveness," Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell said.

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