Welcome to the fall 2015 issue of the McGill Mentor Magazine! We are very proud to introduce to you a few of McGill’s distinguished alumni in this publication. We would like to thank each one of our interviewees for their immense support and contribution to our program.

The McGill Mentor Program celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. Founded in 1995 by Student Organization for Alumni Relations (SOAR), the program is currently managed through a collaboration between the Career Planning Services (CaPS) and University Advancement. The program connects current McGill students to our Alumni and we would like to express our considerable appreciation for our 1000+ mentors who are actively volunteering their time to share their experiences with our students and offer them guidance on career paths. With over 2000 matches so far, the program has proven a great success among the McGill community and we always encourage students to take advantage of this unique opportunity. Over the next semester, our team of Representatives and Journalists will also be bringing you a few of our events including a Mentor/student mixer and Networking workshops!

Over the past few months, I had the chance to meet with many students who participated in our program. A lot of them gave me wonderful feedback and told me of the invaluable advice they have received from their mentors which helped them shape their careers. Along with the Mentor Program, the McGill Career Planning Service (CaPS) provides a great deal of services and programs for career exploration that we encourage students to benefit from during their academic years at McGill.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue and we thank you again for your great support!

– JEEDA ISMAIL
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Pharmaceuticals Industry and More
Mr. Mancini, could you elaborate more on the industry you are in and what you do in particular?

Nuance’s industry pertains to improving human-to-machine interaction, whether it’s while watching television and searching for programming, paying a bill on a handheld device or calling a contact center using natural language to self-serve. The core of the industry is really around the user experience as it pertains to automation, and it’s about finding every application where it might make sense to utilize our technology.

We’re dealing with technologies that help businesses provide automation and other benefits such as security. In voice biometrics, we have a technology called passive authentication, in which callers call an agent and tell them what they want to do, while in the background the caller is being authenticated, so that they don’t have to answer 10 knowledge-based questions.

We are using technology to improve the user experience across all domains including healthcare. More than half of our company is
focused on that. We also work on software enterprise, call centers, mobile devices, and the automotive sector doing speech recognition.

It’s also been useful to improve employee satisfaction in contact centers with thousands of agents that have very high turnover. Agents don’t enjoy the process of asking knowledge-based questions, so we are finding this unexpected benefit in which agents can get directly to business with a caller.

Hannah, could you tell us a bit about your studies and interests and how they align with his and why you chose him as your mentor?

As part of my Linguistics program I took a Computer Science course and I realized that both disciplines have a lot in common. The way syntax and semantics are working together, combined with computer science and learning programming languages, is very exciting to me. Nuance is a great linguistics company that uses computer science to make things better, and so it is a great combination of things I love. I was excited to find someone who had experience in in the field of linguistics and computer science and who has gone through this path and been very successful. He’s had a lot of questions along the way and the answers he’s found are very helpful.

How do you spend a typical day and what do you do on a daily basis?

Mr. Mancini: It’s very dynamic. Hannah and I are in Professional Services. We’re focused on applying our technologies to direct customer engagement. We’re very customer-driven, we need to deliver and make sure customers are happy. A day in the life is never the same. Every engagement is different. How Nuance is going to help a customer is different every time. Why did that customer decide to spend a couple million dollars on an engagement with Nuance? How can I make them turn around and say that was money well spent? It’s very collaborative, it’s very team oriented. It’s not a hierarchical environment, everyone’s got a different job and function, so if we all do it well we will all succeed.

Hannah, what advice do you have for a mentee, to have a successful mentoring relationship? Mr. Mancini, what advice would you give a mentor to be most helpful to the student?

Mr. Mancini: The participation has to come from the student. When the participation comes from the mentee then you jump on it and help them. I try to be very responsive. I get 300 emails a day, but when I see one from Hannah, I act on it. You as the mentor want to help the mentee if they are putting in the effort. For the role of the mentor, two things come to mind: first, be there for your mentee. I did a lot of listening. Only after I understood that I tried to help. Second, there is no script to this. You just get to know the person and tailor your feedback appropriately. Sometimes, as the mentor you need to get the student talking.

Hannah: Have questions! Know what you want to ask from your mentor. From there the whole relationship goes by much more smoothly. Get the conversation going.
What do you think is most unique aspect of the mentor program? Hannah, what do you think are its greatest benefits to students and how does it stand out from your other experiences at McGill?

Hannah: It is very different from any other experience that I’ve had at McGill. It’s the only connection I’ve had to the corporate world. It is the most practical way for me to apply everything that I’ve learned in school and also make connections with the people who are working in the corporate world.

Mr. Mancini: In my view, it’s a great way for students to find out if I am more academically inclined now, if I want to get into a research program or if I want to start doing a job and apply whatever I’ve learned at school sooner than later.

Mr. Mancini, what advice would you give to a student looking to go into telecommunications?

I am biased, but I think Nuance is a great place to work due to the vast array of things that go on here, and the vast set of skills that we employ. I think students should start by looking at what interests them. If they like it, they should orient their skills towards that.

Mr. Mancini, how can students make themselves look attractive to the recruiters?

The resume is the first pass filter. Once we like the resume of the applicant we reach out to them through a phone interview. From that point on, the resume doesn’t matter. Then all that matters is if you fulfill the criteria that the hiring manager is looking for. What we at Nuance look for is for the person to be well spoken, have good interpersonal skills, ability to be professional, focused, and we are looking for analytical skills. We hire a lot of developers. We code in Java almost exclusively. You might think that we only look for people good in Java but that is not true. Some of our developers didn’t even know Java coming in. We hire the attitude but teach the skill. So you are trying to get the right kind of people into your organization. Grades are important but it is not everything. How you interview is crucial. Arrogance doesn’t go very far, so you need to be confident yet humble.

- NANDINI SRIVASTAVA & ASTHA AGARWAL

*This is an edited version of the full interview.*
“The Mentor program provides students the opportunity to develop relationships with mentors who genuinely care about their professional development. The information and experiences my mentor has shared with me have undoubtedly made me more prepared for the professional world.”

— Nathaniel, BA 2017
Entrepreneurship in Information Technology

In an age in which new customer solution technologies are introduced daily, it has become increasingly difficult to successfully introduce a new product to the IT market.

2015 Desautels honorary degree recipient Narayana Murthy, who is co-founder of the global technology consulting firm Infosys and was named Forbes’ 12th greatest entrepreneur, answered questions from students at a reception hosted for him by McGill’s Indian Students Association and the McGill Entrepreneurs Society in May 2015.

Murthy told students that for an entrepreneurial venture to be successful, a few key elements are invaluable.

“First, you must have an idea whose differentiated business value to the market can be expressed in a simple sentence. If you can’t, your customers and employees won’t join you and venture capitalists won’t support you.”

“Second, it is very important for you to think of some method of assessing the market using very little money. While your idea might be extraordinary, it is very important to pitch it to the market and assess if the market is ready to buy your idea.”

“Third, entrepreneurship is all about deferred gratification, so make sacrifices today in hopes that tomorrow will bring a fortune,” Murthy said.

“You will have to undergo considerable discomfort in initial years, be away from loved ones, take much less salary than you deserve, stay in inexpensive hotels, and get rejected by everybody and his brother in your initial years.”

Desautels student entrepreneur Woovin Daniel Han, who just launched an employment-on-demand app, Ahvoda, concurred.

“You really have to put a lot of effort in it, and you can’t expect people to treat you with respect. You will run into multiple barriers that shake the foundation of your idea, and also have hundreds of people telling you that your product is useless. If you manage to go through all this, and iterate on your idea, it will be one of your proudest moments.”

Both Murthy and Han agreed on the importance of a well-informed and well-rounded core team.

“You need people who understand the technicalities of your idea, and you need people who understand how to sell it. If you don’t have people who know how to sell, don’t go to the market,” Murthy said.

“Finding the right group to work with is the hardest thing,” Han remarked. “Though the idea was mine initially, I realized that without a solid team helping me out through hardships, I really couldn’t build a company by myself.”

Han’s company, Ahvoda, allows Montreal restaurants to
recruit McGill students on demand, for tasks such as busing tables or washing dishes. Students can view and accept jobs via an app. His idea was inspired by an employment-on-demand app that he used to find a job as a part-time waiter in Korea.

Han has participated in McGill’s entrepreneurship competitions for students, the Dobson Cup and the McGill Entrepreneurs’ Society’s Thinkathon, which he won with his idea for Ahvoda. He encouraged aspiring student entrepreneurs to seek guidance and resources available to them at the university and in the city.

“If you’re interested in being an entrepreneur, there are a lot of people in Montreal who are willing to help you out, who would give you invaluable advice for who you need to talk to, to get where you want to be.”

A starting point for many students is the McGill Entrepreneurs Society, which organizes a Startup Career Fair each February, a weekend-long business competition known as the Thinkathon in March, and Startup Cocktails at the beginning of each semester.

Over 500,000 new businesses are started every month, and more are shut down, according to Forbes. It’s no secret that entrepreneurship in any industry has reached a high level of competitiveness, and it is not easy to stay in the game.

As such, Murthy told students that the burden is on companies to provide more and more services in order to be successful. In the IT industry, providing software services is no longer enough to build a successful IT company. As consultancy and business process management are increasingly sought after, outsourcing business process management has become a necessity.

Han agreed that the wealth of new businesses has created a very competitive market.

“I’ve come to realize that it is a somewhat saturated market in North America,” Han said. “There are a lot new apps and websites being created daily; some are innovative, but others are mere copy-cats of existing platforms.”

“Get a great idea, a great team, great values, and a market that is ready, and the rest is all very simple,” Murthy advised.

Within the technology industry, U.S. News ranked the careers of Software Developer, Computer Systems Analyst, Information Security Analyst, and Web Developer as the four best jobs this year. IT Managers were in sixth place with a median salary of $123K.

According to Forbes, male entrepreneurs outnumber females by a ratio of 2 to 1. The discrepancy in opportunities and pay between men and women as employees in the IT industry, however, has been shrinking.

According to Glassdoor Report, in 2014, the median base salary of women in the Software Development Engineer role at Microsoft was almost $95K while that of men in the same role was above $101K. In the same year, female software engineers at Google reported a median base salary of $117K, which was $4,000 higher than that of men.

Of Infosys’ 25,000 software engineering trainees this year, 49% were women. Co-founder Murthy noted, however, that none of the company’s executives are women.

Get a great idea, a great team, great values, and a market that is ready.

Murthy said the lack of female executives in the industry is often attributed to women taking time off to raise children in an industry where the only constant is change. Corporations widely discourage telecommuting because the industry lacks models of measuring productivity for telecommuting workers.

To wrap up, Murthy encouraged Desautels Ph.D. students to work on developing models of measuring productivity for staff in various departments to begin solving this problem.

— ASTHA AGARWAL

Works Cited

Alexandra Plante ’11 studied Materials Engineering at McGill. She participated in the Materials Engineering co-op program during university and accumulated a wide range of work experiences prior to graduation at companies including BlackBerry and Pratt & Whitney. Immediately after graduating, she took a role as a post-graduate placement intern in materials for Adidas in Germany for eight months, and then as project manager at an engineering consulting firm for a year where she had previously completed an internship after her U0 year. She then joined lululemon athletica as an Inventor and a year later was promoted to the role of a Senior Inventor.

How did you decide to pursue Materials Engineering? Were you set on your choice of study when you came to McGill?

When you’re 17, you don’t really know what you want to do after. I knew I was good at math and science and I had a pretty ambitious, entrepreneurial personality. I thought about creating products to change people’s lives. The summer after U0 in Electrical, I did an internship at an engineering consulting firm and did some electrical design. I understood that wasn’t where I wanted to be.

I realized that materials engineering is an area that’s going to have one of the biggest impacts on our world and the products we use every day. The reason we’re able to have better quality solar cells today is because we have superior materials to absorb the energy from the sun, the reason our laptops are thinner and smaller is that we have more compact batteries, recyclable materials; and all of these industries – sustainability, aerospace, sporting goods, performance around apparel – are improving because of materials we use. So that’s why I wanted to go into that field.

All types of engineering are important, you have to figure out what drives you, and what it is about that area that drives you. I could have done Electrical Engineering or Mechanical, and I probably would have ended up in the same place. You can end up doing the thing you love anyways.

Some Materials Engineering students are having difficulty obtaining co-op and internship opportunities in their first couple years. Do you have any advice for them? How did you go about securing the internships and work experiences you had while you were still at McGill, and after?

When you’re a first year you might not have many contacts yet, but there are people in your life that do. Get a LinkedIn profile early on and connect with anyone who might be able to help. My first internship was through a friend of a friend who owned the engineering consulting firm. Get your resume in front of the right people. You may know someone who went to school with someone who is in that field. People are usually willing to help others out. It’s a lot easier for me to refer people I know personally.

The reality is that I just applied and I wasn’t afraid to put myself out there, and it worked. Know your value. You are a new student and if you work hard, people will want to invest in you and bring you into their field and teach you about it.

You have only been out of university for four years and you are a senior inventor at Lululemon. What do you attribute to the rapid growth of your career?

My first job was with adidas AG and I wanted to do an internship there, but they needed a recent graduate immediately for eight months. As I was graduating in eight months, we
went our separate ways. However, when I graduated, they called me and asked if I was still interested. So I went off to Germany as a post-graduate placement engineer. I was just taking opportunities as they came.

After eight months, I accepted a job as a project manager. It wasn’t in materials at all, but I knew it would give me the experience I needed to lead projects and be challenged in a way that I might not be in my first materials engineering job. I got a sense for something different and gained transferable skills in different industries.

I was able to get hired at lululemon in part because we were about to manage a really big project internally and that experience set me up for that project. So the reason my career has moved so quickly is that I’ve been able to jump into different opportunities but also prove myself internally at lululemon through having a big project. Don’t be afraid to ask for the responsibility and be entrepreneurial – really push yourself into the project instead of just working for someone.

Be the manager you want to be, in your current role. Right now I’m a Senior Inventor and I am aiming for a director role, so I’m already behaving, interacting and leading projects as though I’m in the next role. Show your value through how you show up in everything you do. Be what you want to become. That’s how you can demonstrate your value to a company and accelerate your career.

On your website you talk about your personality type, which is skilled at recognizing and quickly finding solutions to problems. How has this skill helped you as an inventor?

Knowing your strengths can help you excel. You need to know your strengths and your weaknesses. Find what you’re good at and focus on that. In innovation, I achieve by stepping back from a problem and looking at the whole picture. If I see a problem in one direction, I pivot to go in a different direction.

Could you talk a bit about your industry and your work in particular? What does day-to-day work look like for you?

Inventors are responsible for spearheading day-to-day activities in different project areas. I work on long- and short-term projects. My team, Whitespace works to completely change the industry and pivot to what it will be like in 5 years or 10 years.

We ask: What does the future of the industry – the future of fabrics – look like? Will something we do change our clients’ behavior?
1) We are sometimes working on research and development projects and on incremental scale. For instance, using a plastic cup saves 10 cents and is better for the environment - it doesn't change any behavior but it's a natural incremental improvement.

2) We also work on radical shift in industry. Say we wanted to start using space suits to do yoga (just an example). It's bringing two things that already exist together to create a shift in an industry.

3) Then we work on transformational innovation, which can be 10 years out and completely pivots an industry. For instance, going from a horse and carriage to a train.

We are after very big goals, and we need to be willing to take the risk to stand halfway between what we believe will be true and the future we want to see. We have to push the limits. We need to put one foot in the fire, step off, see how it goes, and put it back in the fire. It's very dynamic.

Sometimes I'm doing research, and sometimes I'm making prototypes. We work with sewing machines, 3D printers, and laser cutters. In the materials lab, we can test the effects of sweat and heat, investigate abraision, break samples apart, test how light affects a product, and use microscopes. I make prototypes and break them apart, and also use the human testing facility, where we can put the fabric on a body, have them run on a treadmill, and test the behavior. We have a climate-testing chamber, which can simulate a run in Calgary and a run in Florida, as well as a run at a high altitude. I see how the product we're creating relates to a person and to real life examples.

I am also working cross-functionally with the business, seeing the work we're doing in materials and having it work with the business. If we do everything in secret and then hand it to the business, it's very difficult to communicate the value. So we work really closely with our cross-functional partners who hire vendors to produce materials, as well as quality assurance, brand team, training team, and educators who work in our stores.

Are you always certain of what project or product you will be working on next?

Being able to work in ambiguity is important. We have to be flexible, and ready for our project direction to change. You work on projects where you don't necessarily the outcome or final product. If you're too safe and you always know what's coming, then it's probably creating the conditions for disruptive innovation.

What aspects of your career do you find most exciting? Most rewarding?

The most exciting part for me is to be working on projects that will directly influence people's decisions and choices everyday. It is the most exciting to change behavior positively, and to be creating the future through materials breakthroughs and product innovation. Legacy is one of my biggest core values, and being able to leave a legacy in how I work with the team as well as the research and products I work on is rewarding for me.

What advice do you have for McGill students looking to get involved in Materials Engineering or inventing? Are there specific opportunities at McGill that you would recommend?

Find out what makes you tick and get involved there. Think about who you want to be five years out of university, and tell your story looking backwards. Think about what got you to that point.

There are very few traditional careers anymore. Great careers are a combination of what you study, who you are, what you are passionate about, and of course hard work!

- Astha Agarwal

*This is an edited version of the full interview.*
The Medical or healthcare Industry is a large sector that includes a range of occupations that provide diagnostic, rehabilitation, healing and preventive services. The medical industry has grown tremendously over the past few decades. There is renewed interest among students to pursue the medical industry as a career. We contacted a fourth year, Marcel Tomaszewski, a student at the McGill Medical School to tell us all about his experiences regarding the program.

We started the interview by asking him about the competitive nature of admissions to medical schools. Marcel said, “Even though the admission process is very competitive, one shouldn’t let that dictate their every action as an undergraduate student. A student should just be motivated and willing to work hard. It’s more about the approach than the activities themselves. Try being a better person in general. Have a well-rounded personality with excellent communication skills. Be passionate about being a doctor. The interviewers usually see through your personality to identify a good doctor.”

He then went on to explain that the admission process is fairly long. He described the admission process as being a two-step progression. “The first step involves submitting the required documents such as the resume, letters of reference, a personal statement, and the transcript. If selected for the second step, the applicant goes through the Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) process. These interviews involve questions related to real life situations and also include some logic questions. There is a centralized interview process for all French schools in Canada. The admission process is similar for international students but more competitive.”

Keeping in mind the needs of the inquisitive monolingual students, we asked Marcel about the French requirements in the McGill Medical School. He told us that French is not a requirement for McGill Medical School. However, it is highly recommended that students learn French because that helps to better the patient care. He said that, “In Montreal, half of the patients speak French so you don’t want to be selecting your patients on the basis of language.” He followed that by telling us the various services available for medical students to learn the language. “The medical school provides French lessons on a Saturday morning. There is also a club that helps in learning medical French.”

Marcel was a Med-P student admitted directly from Cegep. When asked about any advice that he might have for undergraduate students thinking of medical school as a career, he said that, “At the undergraduate level one should try to get as much exposure to medicine as possible. The best possible way to do that is by shadowing another doctor. These opportunities might not come by that easily so it’s important to make contacts. Shadowing another doctor is a great way to see the day-to-day life of a doctor and get familiar with the medical environment. The Medical Student Association has interest groups for students interested in pursuing different specialties.”

It is often said and written that medical school is very tough in terms of the workload. We asked Marcel...
to compare the difficulty levels of undergraduate university and medical school. He said, “Medical students have 30 hours of lecture per week as compared to 15 hours in your undergraduate. Medical school is more difficult but the expectations are different too. You learn how to seize the important and relevant information. You focus on the concepts more than anything else.”

He then went to explain the workload of all four years of the McGill Medical School. “Your first and second years of medical school are very theoretical. The curriculum is basic science related with a lot of lectures. The first and second year are quite similar except that you get some exposure to the hospital in your second year and do a certain number of rotations. In the third and fourth year, you are much more a part of the treatment team and are heavily involved in the decision making process. They have exams at the end of every rotation. But fortunately they do most of the learning on the job. Associating patients’ faces with the concepts makes the learning all the more easy.”

We then asked him about a typical day in his life as a medical student. He talked at length about the various details of his day at the hospital. He explained that a typical day in his life as a fourth year medical student goes by exclusively in the hospital. He articulated that, “over the course of your third and fourth year you do rotations in different specialties. You try and get a broad exposure and depending on what rotation you’re a part of, your day will be different. Each day when you come to work, you are assigned a certain number of patients under a broader treating team, usually a team of residents, fellows, and medical students. After that we usually get together as a team and discuss the labs that came, how the patient’s situation has changed, and our plan for the day. The rest of the day is usually based on executing the plan that we came up with.”

We were amazed when he mentioned that he also finds the time to engage in extra-curricular activities outside of the hospital. He suggested that, “The extra-curricular activities keep you balanced and motivated to keep working. Sometimes it’s important to detach from your work and get involved in something outside of the hospital. It helps you to keep grounded and sane.”

We finally wanted to know about the residency application procedure. He explained it by describing that, “the procedure to apply for residency starts in the fourth year. Your residency is decided on the basis of grades, electives, research interests and extra-curricular activities. Both the students and schools rank each other for the procedure. There is usually an interview to help decide the best place for the student to do their residency. Finally, the Canadian Association of Residency Match, completes the procedure by matching the students with the right place for their residency.”

If there is one message to take home then it is that, there is no formula for getting into medical school. You just need to have the passion to work hard and help people. There is a lot of help available to answer your questions and guide you in the right direction; you just have to ask for it.

The Career Planning Service at McGill has a ton of resources to educate you about the medical industry. With the mentor program, you can choose McGill alumni who are working in the medical industry to answer your questions and mentor you in general. We also have a team of talented and professional career advisors to help you find the answers to your questions. There are workshops organized by CaPS for general advising about the Medical School Applications. There are mock MMI workshops too for students looking to get some hands on training for the application process. In addition to all of this, we have a number of books, journals and online articles to educate the students about the healthcare industry.

– NANDINI SRIVASTAVA

*This is an edited version of the full interview.*
DID YOU KNOW?

90% of recruiting firms do a Google search on candidates

65% - 70% of jobs are landed through networking.

More than a third of hiring managers (35%) immediately screened out candidates based on what they found on candidates’ social networking profiles.
LinkedIn Advice from Professionals

In recent years, LinkedIn has emerged as a leading platform for making corporate connections. We asked a few of our McGill alumni and mentors about the importance of LinkedIn, how they use it as employers, and their tips on how to optimize their profiles.

Alexandra Plante graduated from McGill with a degree in Materials Engineering in 2011. Now she works as a senior inventor with Lululemon Athletica Inc., a leading clothing brand. We asked her, how relevant LinkedIn is to her as a professional and what advice she would give current students with regards to building their professional network on LinkedIn. She said, “Now I’m in a position where I hire people, and people reach out to me on LinkedIn all the time. People are happy to connect, and that’s the platform to do it.” She strongly recommended starting a LinkedIn profile. She suggested, “Write down what your goals are in your summary even if you don’t have any work experience. Put yourself out there in every way. Don’t be afraid to reach out to your friend’s brother’s cousin who works in Google. They will definitely spend 10-15 minutes chatting with you, giving you advice about what they did.”

Doug Dirks finished his B.Ed. in Physical Education at McGill, followed by a Certificate in Radio Journalism from Humber College. He is the host of The Homestretch at CBC Calgary and has specialized as a sports commentator at CBC for years. His advice was as follows, “LinkedIn is important, because it exposes you to different people, gives you an opportunity to connect with people in the industry. Any kind of networking you can do in the industry is a plus. If you can go to a professional conference and make connections, then that would work too.”

Anthony Mancini, Vice President of professional services at Nuance communications gave us his views on LinkedIn from the point of view of a recruiter. In his view, “You need to be careful while using LinkedIn. You can infer a lot just by looking at someone’s profile. I tend to learn stuff about my staff by browsing. Some time back, I saw that someone had liked a post about management. That tells me something that might be irking or pleasing to that employee about how we are managing things around here. I use it to learn about my staff.”

Lorena Di Carlo, is the Managing Director of the Australian and New Zealand operations at Lundbeck, an international research-based pharmaceutical company focused on brain diseases and oncology. She told us about the use of LinkedIn as a networking tool. Di Carlo advised, “LinkedIn is very helpful for networking. I use LinkedIn as a way to get to know the people before I meet them or after, to learn more about them. Also, the pharmaceutical is very specialized so I use LinkedIn to connect with people from different industries and look at their network, to learn more about the people who might be interested in joining our organization.”

Jennifer Ng Ain Kin, an engineer by profession, is the Regulatory Affairs Project Manager at Abbot Point of Care. She gave us a detailed explanation about how she uses LinkedIn in regard to her career, saying, “LinkedIn used to be a lot more useful than now. It was designed as a tool for virtual networking as well as sharing of ideas, etc. However with the new business model where only premium users have access to the important features, it has become a tool for HR recruiters or firms to look for people but also a dumping ground for Marketing people to advertise their wares. However students can still leverage from it. For instance, the recommendations feature is great. I have several recommendations on my LinkedIn profile and at least one for each job position and even volunteer position that I held. My LinkedIn profile URL is prominently shown on my resume and this gives recruiter or recruiting manager a chance to see/learn a bit more about me through those recommendations. Another feature is volunteer activities. LinkedIn gives the candidate a chance to showcase some great accomplishments outside of their line of study but adds to their profile. Also it is always interesting to see who has been looking at your profile (including sometimes your own leaders at work).”

– NANDINI SRIVASTAVA

McGill’s Career Planning Services (CaPS) offers LinkedIn reviews and workshops for students looking to build their professional profiles. For more information and drop in hours, visit mcgill.ca/caps
Let's start by talking about your time in McGill. I understand that you did your MBA here focusing on Business Administration and Management. Could you please tell me a little bit about your experience as a student and how it helped in shaping the career you have today?

I did my MBA at McGill after I had about 10 years of work experience. Some of that experience was already from a mid-level management job. It was really helpful to have some work and management related experience after my undergraduate degree. It was helpful during my MBA too because I could apply my experiences from the management job to my studies. Most of my career had been in the pharmaceuticals industry so the MBA was helpful in learning about the experience outside the industry. The MBA also shaped my career from a networking perspective. Lastly, the MBA gave me the confidence to pursue more senior management roles. That's how I ended up in the position of the Managing Director here in Australia. It is also very important to mention, that McGill has an international reputation so I found it very helpful because I wanted a global career.
I also saw that you have had your work published in the Globe and Mail. How do you think the extra-curricular activities help in one's career as a working professional?

I think engaging in extra-curricular activities is a great way to find new avenues to express yourself. So, if you’re doing an MBA, you want to show that you take initiative; you have broader views on topics and sometimes, that means challenging the status quo. For instance that article I published with professor Carl Moore was about Management Fads. When a student does extra-curricular activities, it shows that put the discretionary effort of going the extra mile. You not only get to showcase your academic skills but also how they complement your work.

With regard to the Mentor Program, I believe you have mentored a few students in the past. Could you tell me a little bit about that? How was your experience being an overseas mentor?

I have mentored about half a dozen students in the past and would love to mentor more in the future. I’ve been mentoring students since I moved to Australia from Montreal in 2007. It is more of a challenge to do the mentoring from so far away but the technology is fantastic. For me mentoring is a great experience. It’s very rewarding. Also, due to my large network, even though I cannot meet the mentees in person, I can always connect them with my colleagues in Canada.

Sometimes the mentors and mentees find it difficult to communicate to the fullest when they can’t meet with each other face to face. Do you have any advice for them on effective communication techniques over emails and Skype? How can they make the most of the mentor program without meeting face to face?

For this program, first it’s important for the mentor and mentee to develop a relationship. The mentor should make the mentee feel comfortable. For that, they can have a few conversations on a general topic, getting to know each other better. I always let the mentee know that there is no such thing as a stupid question and try to have a very open conversation. It’s always better to talk than email because the emails might get misinterpreted and it’s probably more time consuming on both sides. I think once you’ve had a few general conversations then it becomes easier to communicate. The mentee can send the questions in advance and then schedule a time to talk with the mentor. So starting with more general conversations to more structured and specific conversations around the goals of the mentee is a good way to go about it.

You have over 20 years of experience in the healthcare and pharmaceuticals sector. You have worked in North America, Europe and Australia. Could tell me how different the working environment is in these three different continents?

I think the most important thing to remember when you move around and work in different cultures is to be mindful of the local culture. To be a successful global manager you have to be aware of the culture around you. There are differences and similarities in the three continents that I’ve worked. The most important thing is to accept and recognize the diversity and not necessarily compare them. I try to take the experience from each place that I’ve worked in and build on that to form a broader view of the world. One important skill that you can have for a management position is to step back and look at the bigger picture.
You are the managing director of the Australian and New Zealand operations of Lundbeck, which is a very important management position. Could you explain a day in your life as the Managing Director?

The first thing is that no day is the same, which is very exciting for me. Pretty much every day involves looking after my team. The “people” will always come up when you are in these kinds of roles. It involves identifying talents, helping them grow so that they can be the best they can. I take great pleasure in people achieving their goals and fulfilling their potential. My role also involves the customer. I very much believe in being connected with the customers, irrespective of your role.

Pharmaceutical is a vast industry. What are the career prospects for someone interested in this field? What kind of entry-level jobs are available with Lundbeck?

The Pharmaceutical industry is rewarding to be a part of because at its core, it’s about helping patients. Unfortunately, there have been many challenges in the industry lately. Some of the roles that were previously available are not anymore. Having said that, it’s still a very good industry to be in. In our case it’s all about improving the quality of life of people with brain disorders. It’s a place that makes you feel like you are making a difference. There are a lot of career opportunities at a large company like Lundbeck and they range between roles requiring a scientific or medical background to some roles being about sales, marketing and being more commercially oriented. The culture of Lundbeck allows the people to grow in their roles.

What is the job market like in Australia? If one were to compare it with Canada is it more competitive?

The unemployment rate in Australia is quite low. There is actually a shortage of skilled labor in Australia. The economy is quite strong in Australia too. Thirty percent of the employees in Lundbeck Australia are actually from overseas. This is an indication that there is a great influx of skilled labor from overseas to Australia.

What are the skills that one should focus on developing for management positions?

People skills and interpersonal skills are at the top of the list. Then leadership skills, analytical skills, and the ability to make decisions are also important. I think it always helps if you have a broad understanding of the business. One of the other key skills is networking. Lastly, in more senior management roles, you have to be comfortable with making mistakes. There is no manual that you can learn from so you have to be comfortable with ambiguity. The important thing is that you learn from your mistakes so you that are not making the same mistake twice.

How was it to make the transition from the university atmosphere to the job market? How can the students make this transition smoother?

The mentor program and linking with someone from the workforce early on in your career is a good way to start. To make the transition smoother it’s good to have a picture of what you want to do and where you want to work. For me, when I am recruiting I want to make sure that the person wants to be in this organization. So I try to be very transparent about the organization. Don’t be afraid to talk to the people in the organization that you want to join. Having part time jobs, extra-curricular activities are also helpful. Job shadowing is another great way to get a sense of the industry.

With over 20 years of experience in the healthcare and pharmaceutical sector, Lorena has lived and worked in North America, Europe and Australasia while consistently contributing to global corporate strategic initiatives in the course of her career.

– NANDINI SRIVASTAVA

*This is an edited version of the full interview.*
Want more? Drop by our events.

Networking workshops
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And more . . .

Check out “Magazine and Events” at http://www.mcgill.ca/caps/students/services/mentor for more information.
MEET OUR TEAM

JEEDA ISMAIL  MENTOR PROGRAM COORDINATOR

U2 Physiology & Mathematics  “Prior to attending McGill University and moving to Montreal, I grew up in my beautiful hometown Damascus, Syria. I love reading classical and fantasy novels in my free time. I am the VP External of McGill Syrian Student Association and a volunteer with Syrian Kids Foundation; an organization that provides Syrian refugee humanitarian aid. I am interested in pursuing a career in pharmaceuticals and hope to go back and rebuild Syria with a better healthcare system one day!”

ASTHA AGARWAL  JOURNALIST & REPRESENTATIVE

U2 Economics & Computer Science  “I’m Astha, like pasta! I’m from India, spent my childhood in San Francisco, grew up in Boston, and now live in New Jersey. I love talking, making people laugh, and dancing to Bollywood music. I give workshops on saving and making money for the Scholarships office and work at the front desk of RVC, where I lived last year! My dream is to travel the world as a TV journalist reporting on social justice issues.”

NANDINI SRIVASTAVA  JOURNALIST & REPRESENTATIVE

U2 Honors Political Science  “Hi, my name is Nandini. I am from India. I love to read and watch Netflix in my free time. My favourite book is The Fountainhead by Ayn Rand and my favourite TV show is Suits. I am also a big fan of One Direction. I love debating and am involved with the McGill Debating Union as part of its executive team. My favourite food is home made Indian food. After I graduate, I hope to do a job that involves solving real world problems and helping those in need.”
AIDAN CAROLL

U3 Political Science “Between the Career Planning Services Mentor Program, McGill Students for Right to Play and Greek life I study political science, anthropology and communications studies. I enjoy reading the oldest books I can find and occasionally hitting the pitch for a game of footy.”

MAYUMI SUZUKI

U2 Geography “My name’s Mayumi and I am a third year student studying Geography and Arabic. Although I am originally from Japan, I was raised in Connecticut, Ontario, Washington State, and most recently BC. When I’m not in school, I enjoy travelling, hiking, and reading. In the future, I hope to work for a nonprofit in the Middle East or work in conservation in Patagonia!”

EDINA MOLNAR

U3 Economics ”I am in my third, and final year of studies at McGill. I’m originally from Hungary but I’ve also lived in Ukraine. I love getting to know people from different cultures and backgrounds. After graduation I aspire to work in the corporate world for a few years before going to business school. I have a wide array of interests ranging from Management Consulting through to Accounting. As I am exploring different career paths myself, I hope to help out fellow students who have yet to finalize their career aspirations themselves.”

NIVIT KOCHHAR

U3 Computer Science “I grew up in the loud and busy city of New Delhi in India. Off to escape the scorching Indian heat, I ended up here in freezing temperatures of Montreal. I am passionate about travelling and making the most of my international experience here in Canada. I am currently studying computer science, mathematics and cognitive science in my final year of my undergraduate degree. After graduation, I plan to use my skills as a designer to develop unique creative experiences using technology.”