

LIVING THE MULTILATERAL LIFE



photo: courtesy of Amy Bartlett

Amy Bartlett of New Brunswick, standing in front of the Vienna International Centre that houses the UN offices, gained “an intimate understanding of the larger picture of international politics” at her UN job placement.

Young Canadians are seizing opportunities for academic and work experience—and hoping for future careers—with the UN.

Even before landing her first full-time job, 27-year-old Amy Bartlett is a veteran of the United Nations.

As an international law student at Queen’s University in 2000 and 2001, Bartlett was a delegate to model UN assemblies where she grappled with issues on the global agenda. This past year, as a graduate law student at Dalhousie University, she worked in a six-month paid internship at a UN agency in Austria.

“It’s energized me,” the New Brunswick native says of her varied experiences. “It’s helped me focus on what I want to do.” Now Bartlett is dreaming big—with aspirations to work at UN Headquarters in New York in the field of conflict resolution.

She’s one of many young Canadians who are seizing opportunities for UN-related academic and work

experience. From getting involved in international youth conferences and model assemblies for high school and post-secondary students to working with UN organizations abroad, young Canadians are building careers by living the multilateral life.

Bartlett, for example, spent six months with the UN-affiliated International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna in a job placement organized through the United Nations Association in Canada (UNAC) and Foreign Affairs Canada’s Young Professionals International (YPI) program. At the agency, she worked side by side with policy makers and professional diplomats in high-level sessions on such sensitive global hot spots as Iraq and South Korea.

“I was able to gain an intimate understanding of the larger picture of international politics and the international system, as well as Canada’s role and position,” recalls Bartlett, adding that the experience sharpened her skills in communications, intercultural relations and diplomacy. “It’s given me that international professional edge I did not have before.”

Exposing young Canadians to the UN and other global institutions fits with Canada’s strategy to promote our knowledge and innovation in a competitive world, says YPI program officer Brian Foreman. “It’s difficult to find a position at the UN, let alone find something that pays,” he says of the work placements, which come with a stipend of \$12,000. “This represents a turnkey solution for people who want to get into international work.”

The YPI program, supported by FAC and the Canadian International

Development Agency, is open to college and university graduates between 18 and 30 who are keen for first-job experience in an international setting. Since 1997, some 240 of the 3,500 interns sponsored by FAC have worked with the UN and affiliated organizations in placements organized by 46 non-governmental agencies, including UNAC.

Andrea Chow, the project officer for youth internship programs at UNAC, says the placements give young professionals a chance at meaningful work and contacts that could lead to full-time jobs. “Young people are in a Catch-22 situation,” says Chow. “They want a job to gain experience, but employers offering jobs require people with experience already.”

It’s a formula that Alina Pleszewska, 26, of Montreal, is applying to her own career. With degrees in civil, common and international law from universities in Canada, France and Australia, Pleszewska was selected in 2004 for a six-month internship with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Quito,

International work: Alina Pleszewska of Montreal (centre) worked with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Quito, Ecuador, resettling refugees such as this extended family that had fled the conflict in neighbouring Colombia.



photo: courtesy of Alina Pleszewska