



Sabrina MacKenzie

Written by Stefan Warkentin, M.Sc. Trainee

Sabrina MacKenzie is a Technical Officer at a National Research Council of Canada facility here in Halifax, who has worked with natural products research throughout her career. Sabrina began her career by completing a MSc. program for which she studied mycotoxins produced by a fungi which is harmful to some agricultural products. After completing her degree, Sabrina continued to work on this project as hired a staff member. She was later hired by the NRC where she works as a technical officer specializing in natural products, a position that she has held for the past ten years.

Sabrina's work at the NRC covers a broad range of duties, involving her in all aspects of the research process. This includes literature search, report writing and paperwork, experimental design, data analysis, presentation of results, wet lab work and field-collection of samples. For one project she collects samples of seaweed from local beaches, which is certainly a nice break from being in the office. This variety of tasks is one aspect of the job that she particularly enjoys. An estimated 20% of time is spent with paper and computer work with the rest contributed by experimentation. Sabrina is currently working on five projects contracted of the NRC by client companies. These contracts are paid for on a yearly basis and so there is a lot of pressure near they end of this period to complete work and produce results for each project. Time management and organizational skills are especially important when handling multiple projects in this way.

The NRC is divided into groups based on research or work topic which are made up of employees with diverse scientific backgrounds spread out at various facilities across the country. Within these groups particular projects are assigned by a team leader who is responsible for administrative duties related to managing employees and aiding the development of their careers. Within each project, work is organised by a project lead, who is responsible for organising the project and results in a general sense. However, it is up to project members to pursue the goal assigned by the lead independently, organising their own work and results. This work environment is highly collaborative and bears many similarities to academic research groups.

Sabrina first started at the NRC as a technical officer with a lower level of responsibilities and progressed within this position as she gained experience. Although there was no formal training process, the highly collaborative environment at the NRC allows new technical officers to learn from and build off the knowledge of their colleagues while also providing their own knowledge and expertise to the group. This speaks to the importance of skills such as teamwork, problem solving, communication and initiative that we have discussed as part of the CREATE program.

Sabrina's advice for graduates transitioning into industry is to be flexible and open to any opportunities that arise, and that employers are primarily looking for candidates that have a good attitude and ability to learn more so than those with direct work experience.