PSI Placement Student Profile Competition

Winning entry:

Jonathon, GSK

One of the main reasons why I chose my particular degree was the opportunity to take a year out in industry. My university, in particular, seemed to have some strong links with big companies. A year in industry is an excellent opportunity for a student to get a taste of working life in a sector you may be thinking about following a career in. It is also a great way to gain valuable contacts, earn some money, apply the skills you have been taught at university and it looks good on your CV! GlaxoSmithKline were the first company to offer interviews and I'd been offered a position before even having an interview anywhere else. Past student's accounts of their time here were very positive however and I was looking forward to spending a year with GSK.

I have been working for the past year in the drug discovery section of the company, but I have also been allowed a unique opportunity to work on some projects in clinical phase I, giving me a broad idea of the range of jobs available to a statistician in the pharmaceutical industry. The contrast of the work between the two sections is immediately obvious with the pre-clinical work being more exploratory and the clinical work more stringent and regulated. I frequently used techniques I had learnt in university such as ANOVA, t-tests and regression and I have also learnt many new techniques and methods such as repeated measures analysis, bootstrapping, sample size calculations and knowledge about experimental design.

I had only done a few statistics modules in the first two years of my degree, this year gave me the opportunity to focus what I had learned so far and build upon it. Having had very little experience with statistical software or programming, I was initially concerned that I wouldn't have the knowledge required to do my job properly, but these concerns proved unfounded. I was given plenty of training in the software packages I use on a daily basis such as SAS, R and S-Plus. There is also always someone to ask if you have any problems, no question is ever a stupid question. The open plan offices allow for employees from a variety of backgrounds to share their knowledge in different areas.

Another advantage of the placement year was the opportunity to go on many in-house training courses and gain new knowledge to take back to university with me. I had my first introduction to Bayesian statistics by way of company-run three day course. I also had the opportunity to further my (very limited) knowledge in biology and chemistry to get a better understanding of the experiments that produced the data I worked with.

Overall I feel my work placement will stand me in good stead for my final year at university. The new knowledge I have acquired in statistical methodology and programming will be of benefit to me in my final year modules which are largely statistics-based. I am also confident that I have had a good look at the industry from the inside, which will help me when the time comes to decide on a career path. I was

surprised by the variety of jobs available to the statistician in the pharmaceutical industry, and it is certainly a career path which presents diversity and opportunity.