

Co-op program can be key to success

When Maaïke Van Gogh arrived in Canada from a semester exchange from the Netherlands in 2008, she did not know at the time that it would turn into a successful career as a human resources benefits analyst at Nexen Energy.

The exchange was a mandatory part of her international business management studies program in Utrecht and had heard great things about the University of Lethbridge Calgary Campus from a friend who had completed their exchange there a few years before.

“Due to the timing of my exchange (Spring semester of 2008) I ended up having a choice of Spain or Sweden, but I didn’t want either — I don’t speak Spanish nor Swedish, and I wanted to make sure I would be able to communicate with the people in my host country,” says Van Gogh, who

“So after a few weeks of stubbornness I managed to convince my school to allow me to go to Canada instead.”

Now seven years later, Van Gogh has recently graduated from uLethbridge with a bachelor of management degree. She credits her current success to the uLethbridge Faculty of Management’s co-op programs.

“Co-op positions are a great way for students to gain experience — there is an abundance of co-op positions out there, even during these difficult economic times,” says Van Gogh.

“At the same time, in my experience, co-op positions are challenging enough to give you real-life experience, which is also reflected in the pay.”

Being able to combine full-time co-op work with full-time course work is what allowed Van Gogh to complete her degree without accumulating any student debt, which was important to her because she faced international student rates.

But beside being debt free, Van Gogh says the greatest benefit she has gotten from the co-op program is her current position at



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Nexen Energy ULC.

“The original co-op position allowed me to gain the knowledge and experience needed to succeed in my current role — without it, I don’t believe I would have been qualified for the position,” says Van Gogh.

“I’ve been very lucky to have ended up with Nexen; they really do see their students as valuable employees, and treat them as they would any other employee.” For more information about the uLethbridge Calgary Campus, visit discover.uleth.ca.