

## Career Profile

### Caroline Marshall, Research Assistant – Public Health

By: Mehak Bhatia, Peer Advisor

Following graduation from WLU in 2008 with an Honours Biology Degree, Caroline Marshall obtained a paid internship position with the Seniors Health Team at Ottawa Public Health. Following three months of hard work and networking, Caroline was able to obtain the status of a permanent Research Assistant position within the same organization.



During her tenure at Laurier, Caroline worked as a Health Information Assistant Analyst for an epidemiological study of colorectal cancer and analyzed the impact of lifestyle factors on the likelihood of being affected by colorectal cancer. This job familiarized Caroline with the research dimension of the health care field and initiated Caroline's interest in both public health, and research. In addition, speaking to research professionals and volunteering with Laurier's Emergency Response Team enhanced Caroline's interest and knowledge of the health field. Caroline also participated as a Youth Innovator in Ghana, where she educated about 2000 Ghanaian students and teachers about sexual health. Working at an international level during her undergraduate years acquainted Caroline with cross-cultural perspectives on health care as well as fuelled her interest in global health.

On a daily basis, Caroline conducts literature reviews, scans the environment for emerging health issues and networks with peer health units to keep herself updated. Caroline is also responsible for preparing high profile presentations with detailed diagrammatic representations of the various trends observed in the field of public health. Caroline also engages herself as an active team player in her meetings with management to disseminate important information. Caroline's contribution for the internal publications sets her apart from other research assistants at Ottawa Public Health.

Caroline explains that the objective of research can sometimes be undefined, which might make the researcher lose focus. Therefore, it becomes important for the researcher to study the topic area in depth so as to clarify the objective. Additionally, Caroline also finds that the work of a research assistant is very independent. Hence, for someone who is pursuing the career of a researcher, it becomes crucial to be self-directed.

The job of a research assistant is fairly secure since every sector needs research. The field of public health in particular is constantly expanding due to an increased focus on global health. However, Caroline notes that the field of research is also extremely competitive since one is competing with many qualified individuals from different areas of study. Hence, it is vital to engage in some volunteer or paid work experience so as to develop solid background in the field of research as well as effectively demonstrate research skills. Universities particularly offer numerous opportunities for students to gain research experience.

For students who are pursuing a research career, Caroline suggests undertaking a thesis project to foster research and critical thinking skills as well as refining your ability to be self-directed. An epidemiology course offered by Laurier is also recommended so as to develop some background knowledge in public health care research. Moreover, an online course on how to conduct literature reviews offered by the Public Health Agency of Canada Skills Development Program is smart to consider. The Government of Canada funds many internship programs that provide excellent learning opportunities and stepping stones in the desired field. Gaining membership with organizations such as the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) can also be extremely valuable in terms of the resources and networking opportunities.

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