

Interview with Dr. Ruby Nadler

Rebecca Liu

Dr. Ruby Nadler is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Research Psychologists Press Inc through the MITACS Elevate program. MITACS is a Canadian not-for-profit organization that provides internships and training programs combining scientific and business skills in partnership with industry, government and academia.



Dr. Nadler received her PhD in Cognitive Psychology from Western University in 2013. When I first spoke with Dr. Nadler at a Graduate Career Day event, she was very kind and thoughtful in sharing her career path following the completion of her PhD. In my interview with Dr. Nadler, she shares in depth her steps and experiences working in an industry setting as a postdoctoral fellow.

What is your position, what does the MITACS fellowship entail?

The MITACS Elevate Postdoctoral Fellowship program was created to provide a bridge between academia and industry. Postdoctoral scholars spend roughly equal amounts of time at the headquarters of their industrial sponsor, and at their academic institution. Scholars work on a research problem that is of interest to their industrial partner and to their academic supervisor.

I have a Ph.D. from the Psychology department's Cognition and Perception area, and am leveraging my cognitive psychology expertise to explore more applied research questions.

Can you briefly describe one of the projects you are currently working on?

My primary project uses eye-tracking technology to investigate faking behavior on personality assessments used for employee selection. My industrial partner, Research Psychologists Press, creates and administers personality assessments for employee selection purposes so the topic

of faking is of significant interest to them.

What steps did you take to find or acquire this position? In particular, what educational background and extracurricular involvement helped prepare you for this position?

As I was completing my Ph.D., I knew I wanted to stay in London, ON if possible so that constraint influenced my job search quite a bit. I learned about the MITACS postdoctoral fellowship through my graduate department, and was aware that Research Psychologists Press had previously hired people with Ph.D.'s in psychology so I contacted them to see if they were interested in working on a research project together through the Elevate program.

Giving presentations and talks at meetings and conferences helped me to develop strong communication and public speaking skills which are very helpful for job interviews and working with others. When I interviewed at Research Psychologists Press, I was able to clearly communicate what I had done while I was in graduate school and what skills I particularly enjoyed using or felt were my strongest assets. I spent a lot of time during graduate school working on identifying my transferrable skills, and polishing my interviewing skills through my university career centre. I think that helped me to sell myself during the interview stage.

What are the benefits and drawbacks of your current position?

The primary benefit is that I'm gaining experience in industry while still being affiliated with an academic institution. Having a foot in each door has provided me with a lot of useful experience I wouldn't have gained if I were solely associated with either my industrial partner or with the university. I'm still participating in academic life, publishing in academic journals and building my CV, but I'm also gaining "real world" work experience. The drawback is the flipside of that, which is that my time and attention are split to an extent, but overall it's been a great opportunity.

Can you describe a typical day in your position?

When I'm working at the university I'm usually collecting the behavioral data for my research study and working on data analyses or preparing results for publication. When I'm working at my industrial sponsor's headquarters, I'm consulting with the research team about the study, presenting results, and preparing for the next steps. It's similar to being in graduate school when you're working on a research-based dissertation, but I'm getting the perspective from industry in addition to the input of academic supervisors.

What unique non-academic skills do you believe are most valuable in your current position?

I'm not sure that it's a unique or non-academic skill, but being able to adapt to changing circumstances and priorities is always beneficial. There are always competing priorities and unknowns that make flexibility essential so that you can stay on track, but also be open to new possibilities or adapt to constraints.

If you were graduating this year, what career path would you pursue that is not your current one and why?

I'm not sure I can give a good answer to that, but to give graduate students an idea of what other people with similar backgrounds in psychology from my cohort (graduating in 2013-2014) are doing: some are in Tri-Council-funded postdoctoral positions at universities, and others are working as research coordinators, grant writers, research analysts, and lecturers (adjunct professors). Some have switched entirely out of academia and are leveraging programming and computational skills that they gained during their studies in the private sector. There are obviously a lot of different possibilities. I think spending time figuring out what your strengths and transferrable skills are, updating and converting CV's into resumes (often several different ones so that they're tailored to each specific job or type of job), doing mock interviews, and applying for different jobs is time well spent. Versatilephd.

com has stories of academics that switched successfully from academia to other industries (along with their CV's and resumes) and it's a resource that helped me a lot. Many universities have access to it now, so it's worth looking into.

Can you give any advice to graduate students looking to pursue a career in your field?

There are so many different paths graduate students can take. I think it's important to start thinking about next steps as early as possible, and to be open to different possibilities because the job market changes so quickly. Don't be afraid to reach out to alumni and people who might be able to connect you to potential employers or people who have valuable information, and don't be afraid of taking a direction that you hadn't anticipated: you might end up loving it! ■

**Rebecca Liu**

Rebecca H. Liu is a second-year PhD candidate in Health & Rehabilitation Sciences (Health Promotion) at the University of Western Ontario. Her research focuses on using health coaching as a behavioural intervention among specialized populations to reduce cardiometabolic health risk.