

Caitlin Day-Lewis, AB 2004

Director of Development, Friends of the Children—Boston

Career arc

As an undergraduate, Ms. Day-Lewis studied abroad in Ireland, where she concentrated on education and peace and conflict studies. She also held many different work study positions while at Wash-U, including an elementary school program called Y-Read. While these experiences were not explicitly required by her current position, having this type of knowledge was helpful and provided her with a concrete example of her interest and why she was qualified to work for Friends of the Children.

Ms. Day-Lewis had known about her current organization for some time before beginning to work there, and she also was acquainted with a former employee. This gave her a few connections. She conducted many informational interviews during the job search process, which often involved taking people out to coffee. Ms. Day-Lewis stresses the importance of this type of networking. Because many jobs are never actually posted, the more you can talk to people in your field, the better.

The relevance of anthropology

Ms. Day-Lewis majored in both educational studies and anthropology while she was an undergraduate at Washington University. She focused mainly on cultural anthropology, and she feels she learned many valuable skills that translate well into the non-profit world. She finds that she frequently interacts with many different people in her work, and her anthropological perspective provides her with the ability to understand context (i.e., where others are coming from) and how to treat people with respect. Additionally, the training she received in writing and ethnography while she was an undergrad has served her well. She now conducts a few different projects that involve going out into the community and gathering information.

Marketing anthropology

While she hasn't experienced many employers questioning the relevance of anthropology during job interviews, she finds it important to present anthropology as the study of different cultures, which provides her with a context to understand where people are coming from.

Advice to undergrads, new grads

Ms. Day-Lewis recalls that her job search was broad and unfocused during her senior year. She knew she wanted to do something in the non-profit sector, but she did not have a specific location in mind. This made the job search difficult. She decided to register on the AmeriCorps website, and she was able to acquire a position with that organization.

For undergraduates in a similar situation, she recommends choosing a city where you want to live and then moving there or at least planning trips to that location. To illustrate the importance of living in your target city, Ms. Day-Lewis explains that when she is hiring someone at her current organization, she'll often receive 100 great applications from people in the Boston area. With such an excellent pool of local candidates, it simply does not make sense to consider people living across the country.

In terms of adjusting from the life of a college student to a person in the work force, Ms. Day-Lewis finds that one of the biggest differences is the way in which you become responsible to other people. You cannot procrastinate in your job, and you have to be somewhere 9-5 every day. However, unlike college, you have your weekends and evenings free, and of course, you get paid for your efforts!

Finally, she advises that when you are applying for jobs, do so as soon as the position becomes available, and be aggressive. Make sure you can attach your resume as a PDF. Whatever job you choose, be sure to do your best, be proactive, and do not be afraid to work your way up.