Economics major founds an employment service for arts grads

By RIVA GOLD
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After dozens of papers, scores of sleepless nights and countless cups of coffee, thousands of students graduate with bachelor of arts degrees every year. For many of them, their job prospects are less than ideal. As someone who recently faced this reality, Lauren Friese founded TalentEgg, a service that matches up recent arts graduates with meaningful entry-level positions. “We basically provide the services a campus career fair used to,” the 25-year-old says.

“My arts degree was kind of a hard sell,” says Friese, who completed her degree in economics from Queen’s University in 2005. “When I graduated, I really didn’t know how to get into the workforce.”

“Many companies look for specific educational backgrounds, but the fact is, a large majority of students study things like history or politics. It’s hard for employers to see how degrees like that translate into actual jobs.”

Friese considers herself a huge advocate for the value of an arts degree.

“There is a massive group of students ignored in the recruitment of entry-level talent,” she says. For her, arts degrees promote crucial “soft skills,” including information dissection, problem solving, meeting deadlines and time management.

“As a former arts student, Friese uses her lack of a formal background in business. Running TalentEgg has been challenging for Friese, who has no formal background in business. “I read a lot of books on marketing and sales, and online tutorials about how to do my accounting,” she says. “Business tactics can be learned, though, but being driven and persistent is what you really need to make things work.”

As a former arts student, Friese uses her lack of business training to her advantage.

“I think it allows me to come up with more creative ways to solve problems. On the other hand, I also just surround myself with fantastic people that have lots of experience,” she says.

So far, TalentEgg has worked with close to 4,000 students and more than 100 employers.

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Aside from her business, Friese also speaks at career events and writes articles about soft skills and recruiting. She sits on the board of the Ryerson University liberal arts program and is involved with a “women in IT” group.

Speaking to large audiences, Friese often draws upon her own experiences.

A few weeks ago, she spoke at the annual Conference Board of Canada about the role of Generation Y in the coming years. She highlighted the importance of hiring arts graduates in light of the looming baby boom retirement.

“While the economy is going badly right now, there is still a big baby boom retirement coming up, and those that haven’t planned are facing up to 50 per cent of their staff retiring over the next five years,” she says.

“Hiring someone who is ambitious and new is a great way to bring in someone inexpensive to fill in those gaps quickly.”

For Friese, arts students are particularly suited to fit that mould.

“Arts students are often better, because they’re cheaper and more adaptable... They’re often better at learning, because that’s what they’re taught at school,” she says.

For more information about TalentEgg, visit talentegg.ca.