

# And now for something completely different:

# HEEBONICS

## Economics major finds an employment service for arts grads

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**A**fter 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.

"Any program at an accredited university offers a certain standard of teaching and has certain expectations of their students. What you prove in university is your aptitude - it doesn't matter what specifically you studied," she adds.

After her undergraduate degree, Friese decided to pursue a master's degree from London School of Economics (LSE) in economic history. At the school, Friese networked with her international peers and soon after landed a rewarding entry-level position.

"In London, there were several websites to help students transition from school to work. I used one successfully to find a job in a small consulting firm,"



Jennifer Swales, left, and Cassandra Jowett, two TalentEgg summer interns, sit in their office known as the "Egg Carton."

she says.

"When I moved back to Canada, I found that there really wasn't a resource like that here. We're way behind."

Friese had always been a self-proclaimed "Internet geek," with an interest in web trends. "I saw a system that worked so well in the U.K. that it was obvious I'd have to do that here," she says.

In April, she started TalentEgg to mirror the job-finding programs that worked for her in the United Kingdom. The company works exclusively with arts graduates and employers to find suitable matches, free of charge.

TalentEgg also educates employers about how to recruit suitable applicants.

"Canadian employers put too much emphasis on recruitment through job fairs or connections. Students aren't looking there. A lot of bright, talented students are just going online," she says.

Friese and her co-workers also work with recent graduates, and encourage them to think of job interviews as sales jobs.

"The interview is like selling yourself as a product - your human resource talents, your drive. Focus on how your background benefits the workplace," Friese says.

"Your resumé can't just be a list, either. Make it a sales document emphasizing the benefits you can bring to the job. You really have to paint a picture for them.

"The key is not to draw lines between your prior experience in academia and the job at hand. What you actually want to do is just promote your core skills," she says.

For Friese, she learned to stop focussing on what she learned while working at the clothing store the Gap and instead explained that she worked at the Gap so that she could afford to study at LSE.

Another important piece of advice: students should network before they graduate, she says.

"Anyone who has signalled to the world they want to do something in university ends up in something interesting and challenging."

"In my Queen's bubble, everyone brought something to the table. Surround yourself with good people."

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



Lauren Friese considers herself an advocate for the value of an arts degree and works to match recent arts grads with good jobs.

have lots of experience," she says.

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

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](http://talentegg.ca).