

Sometimes you find yourself in the most unexpected places...

When I graduated from Rhode Island College in 1999 with a BA in Communications, I needed a higher-paying job. After all, I had my degree, my husband had just proposed, and we had a wedding to fund. Also, I have always believed in being a financial contributor in the household.

Like most new graduates, I started distributing my resume, applying to many companies, hunting through the Classifieds section in the newspaper, and searching the web every day. I found myself wanting to find a place where I could be of help to others, where I could be content for a time, and where I would be compensated for an amount higher than what I was making as a Salon Coordinator.

Countless searches brought me to a Job Fair at Putnam Investments in Franklin, MA. They were hiring for Customer Service Representatives. I had no investment or financial experience; however, I had a great deal of practice answering the phone. "Sure, I can do that!" (And the pay was \$8000 more than what I was currently making.) I did a little research on the company. Putnam had been around since 1937 and had billions in assets under management. I thought, "It seems like the company is solid. This will be a good place for me to get my feet wet in 'Corporate America'; a place where I can begin; a place where I can learn about investing for the future."

On October 18, 1999, I accepted an offer and became an employee of Putnam Investments.

While providing superior customer service to our callers, I thought of Putnam as a stepping-stone. At first, I had no intention of staying long-term. Although being a customer service representative is a very respectable, valuable position, I did not envision doing it for an extended period of time. I was capable of more, and I knew it. I wanted more.

As time went by, I developed friendships, and a loyalty to the company. I learned and I grew. Once I had gained experience within the company, I posted for an Employee Development Associate position. And here is where I've found my career. There is an enormous difference between the word *job* and the word *career*.

I joined the Enterprise Technical Training team in April 2001.

As an Employee Development Associate, I wear many hats. My responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Provide technical training for new hires, as well as ancillary training for existing employees, using the ADDIE process of Instructional Systems Design, and Adult Learning Theory.
- Responsible for the development and implementation of training materials, including textbooks and skills assessments.

- Spear headed the development of a four-week annuities training program for the Putnam Allstate variable annuity products.
- Participate with annuities administration in the development and implementation of web-based monthly progress checks for existing employees.
- Responsible for the development, BETA testing, and implementation of numerous E-Learning modules.
- Assess, measure and report progress of all learning participants to management.
- Use Outstart Evolution (LCMS) to develop and maintain E-Learning content.
- Use the Macromedia MX Studio to keep our intranet site current, and develop stand-alone learning objects.
- Provide consultative services to my assigned business units: Insurance Products Services and Institutional Management.

When I first joined ETT, E-learning was a new initiative; less than 5% of our learning content was web-based. Today, over 75% of our content is online. I am proud to be a part of the process. I have learned:

- E-learning is an industry that is quickly changing the way corporations cultivate their employees. It is important to keep current with those changes.
- It is important to broaden my knowledge of technological advances in educational design and delivery.
- It is important to utilize technology appropriately to enhance business productivity.

And, now, I find myself, once again, wanting more.

All this brings me to The University of Maryland University College. I believe UMUC can provide me with an in-depth course of study for the educator pursuing a leadership role in current and emerging learning environments; a program that will address both why and how technology is best incorporated into the practice of the professional educator. I am confident that a Master of Distance Education will give me the skills I need to further my career.

Sometimes you find yourself in the most unexpected places...

I never expected to become an educator. But here I am, and here, I will stay. Please consider me for your program.

Sincerely,

Melissa A. Smith