

THURSDAY CAREERS CHATS

Date of Session: 4/14/2011 Title of Session: Careers with the FBI

Alumni Presenter: Pam Byron Class Year: 1993

Title: Counterterrorism Analyst Employer: FBI

Notes from Session:

Background:

- Career path wasn't a straight line from college to current position, but the underlying guiding force to career decisions was an interest in the field of international relations and a number of experiences in college and graduate school solidified that and afforded me opportunities to ultimately get a job in that field.
- Studied abroad during her junior year in Bologna. At graduation, job market was bleak and knew she wanted to attend grad school at some point, so made the decision to go straight to grad school. Ultimately applied to American University's School of International Service because it was in DC and it offered a strong program in internship programs during grad school. Did a couple of internships while a grad student that gave her professional experience.
- While at American University, she applied to the Presidential Management Internship (now Fellowship) program. Prior to the two year experience, Pam was able to attend a career fair for PMI interns (fellows) where she met the FBI. While she wasn't intending to pursue that route, the people from their agency impressed her.

Her work with the FBI:

- There are typically two main national security issues at the FBI: counterintelligence and counterterrorism. Since 9/11, the composition of numbers of employees for each has changed. Pam is a senior intelligence manager, and in her role she interacts as an advisor and mentor on a specialty topic -- counterterrorism. She provides her own expertise and also helps other analysts raise points to senior leaders in the agency and government. She also mentors junior analysts as well. Her days are always different. Some days she accomplishes many points on her to-do lists, while other days are completely overtaken by events and she must react to things that come up. She participates in briefings, both formal and informal, with the Director, Deputy Director and other leaders as well as helping with preparation for White House Homeland sessions. She also represents the organization outside of the FBI. She also needs to read materials, collaborate and keep up to speed on issues.
- Writing decision papers on quick turn-around is also part of the job, and the Dickinson experience helped Pam to prepare for that role. She interacts with a number of similar organizations that have a shared mission so participating in meetings around DC on operational and intelligence matters with these other agencies can keep the days interesting. Of course, there is the mandatory paperwork that everyone needs to accomplish in their jobs, so not every day is glamorous or only full of fast-paced operational matters.

Advice to students:

- Advice to students includes figuring out what you want to do with your career as well as what interests you about the FBI. For example, does someone want to be an agent (federal law enforcement officer) who will work any number of different criminal programs or does someone want to be an intelligence analyst with a specific areas of expertise?
- Look into experiences leading to what you want to do and work your way into positions of interest. Check employment qualifications to verify that you really should be applying to the FBI or similar organizations (i.e. citizenship and drug use stipulations).
- To enter the field, consider working for a contractor or think tank. Contractors like Booz Allen Hamilton or Centra have staff members that are paid by them working in Agency offices as a "staff job" that might be more entry level; and, conversely, the think tanks offer networking opportunities because of the types of speakers they offer and work they do (i.e. Brookings Institute, Rand Corporation, New America Foundation and CSIS).
- Attributes that will help you as you enter the job market (especially a tight one) are: communication skills, both oral and written, the ability to clarify and clearly communicate details briefly and efficiently, and a solidly built reputation that can grow to prove that you are a "go to" person in getting the job done.
- There are entry level jobs in the agency at the Bachelor's level. There are also programs through the Department of Defense to get your master's degree in security studies while working full-time. The marketplace is extremely competitive, so the advantages that you can build through internships and other opportunities can help you to succeed in finding a job. There are a fairly high number of people with military background; however, some other team members have master's degrees in international studies while others might be called "regional specialists" with experience and education in a particular region. The skill set that you need includes writing, research, analysis and critical thinking.
- Specific training to be an analyst or agent will be provided by the agency, and it is long for new agents (20+ weeks). Agents have a minimum and maximum age, so you would need to find another role before applying to become an agent. The Agency finds that it is important to use smart people where they're needed at the time, so you may need to move to another role that is not your specialty or area of expertise during times of change.