

A Way to “Give Back”

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Welcome to the real world! Get a bunch of ivory tower professors and match them for two weeks with ad agencies in New York, Chicago, or San Francisco and what do you get? The answer: The Visiting Professor Program (VPP) offered by the Advertising Educational Foundation (AEF).

What a wonderful opportunity for both the professors and the ad agencies! The agencies get some fresh perspectives and the professors get a glimpse of Madison Avenue.

This year’s VPP was July 16-27, with 13 professors being placed with different ad agencies in New York, four professors with ad agencies in Chicago, and one professor placed in North Carolina. Eighteen professors out of 65 applicants were selected for this year’s VPP. The professors’ backgrounds were in: Advertising, Anthropology, Communications, Economics, English, Information Technology, Journalism, Marketing, Political Science, Public Relations and Sociology.

The VPP echoes Bob Greenberg’s July 23-27, 2007 AdWeek editorial on advertising agencies “giving back” to universities. The VPP is a perfect example of this synergy. The first two days involves an orientation program where the professors spend separate mornings and afternoons with AEF, JWT, McCann, and Ogilvy. Then starting on Wednesday through the following week, the professors work with a designated ad agency where there is a fit with each professor’s area of expertise.

I was fortunate to work with R/GA, AdWeek’s #1 interactive advertising agency of the year. My areas of expertise are in knowledge management, social networking, and data mining. I worked on a project with the Data Intelligence group, directed by Luane Kohnke, and R/GA’s Chief Scientist, Greg Glass. Barry Wacksman, the Chief Growth Officer at R/GA and a Director on AEF’s Board, linked me up with R/GA. What a fabulous experience! R/GA makes social networking, collaboration, and innovation a reality. I was the “old man” (even though I’m only 49). The enthusiasm and entrepreneurial spirit of R/GA’s employees was infectious. Coming from the IT field, I also learned new terms and concepts for me in the advertising domain. By working on a project, as well as sitting in client, management, and production meetings, I had an enriching experience that I will always treasure.

And it doesn’t stop here. I have proposed ways to continue our relationship through possible projects, research, case study work, and recruiting. The VPP is a prime example of what Bob Greenberg describes as “giving back”.

From this experience, I feel I am thinking and creating faster than ever before (as well as walking, talking, and eating faster from the NYC life!). As a professor from Johns Hopkins University, I am privileged to have been part of the VPP. I encourage other professors and ad agencies to follow suit--who knows, you never can tell where it may lead!