

## **Co-op of a Lifetime**

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Recently, I was fortunate enough to interview the winner of our 2003 Co-op Student of the Year award, Christopher L. Gaunt. A local employer of many Western graduates, Crisp Hughes Evans, llp, sponsors this award each year.

Gaunt, presently a graduate student here at Western, was an undergraduate studying business management when he was awarded this distinction. He co-oped for John Schiffli Real Estate in Highlands, North Carolina, about an hour from WCU's campus .

Shortly after Gaunt finished his co-op, the director of career services and cooperative education, Mardy Ashe, notified him that he had been nominated for the 2003 Co-op of the Year award. Twenty-one students were nominated, and eleven students made it to the final round of judging. When the final tally was in, Gaunt was chosen by a panel of five judges to receive the award. Surprised, Gaunt said it felt "great" to receive this recognition.

Gaunt was responsible for a variety of tasks while working for John Schiffli Real Estate, serving as administrative assistant to all of the brokers, filing documents, and ordering office supplies, as well as conducting research.

Additionally, he developed and implemented new advertising methods; one included the marketing of rentals. John Schiffli Real Estate does not deal in rentals. However, Gaunt researched and compiled data that yielded a list of rental agencies in the area.

The resulting marketing strategies helped promote the agency, bringing two new customers to John Schiffli Real Estate.

One of the more important tasks... Gaunt assumed charge of was the purchase of a new central networking computer for the agency. After doing much research and getting permission from the owners, Gaunt placed an order for the new system. Not only was Gaunt successful in ordering and installing the new system, he was also responsible for getting the ball rolling on entering time-sensitive information for all the agency's clients.

When I asked Gaunt if he felt the experience helped him in his future career endeavors, even though he wasn't going into real estate, he replied that he learned how to manage people better. This experience helped Gaunt learn how to communicate and become more efficient in identifying and meeting the needs of employees and customers. He went on to say that he would do it over again and that he would recommend a co-op to any student. Gaunt concluded with saying, "I think that every major should require a co-op."