



A newsletter of the Society of Actuaries/Casualty Actuarial Society

2009 Summer Issue



Share



Printer-Friendly
Newsletter



Search Back Issues

In This Issue

[¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?
Studying in Mexico, for
a Change!](#)

[Actuaries with an MBA-
Is This the Path for
You?](#)

[Meet Your Candidate
Rep!](#)

[Workplace Etiquette
Series: How NOT to
Break the "Codes" at
Work](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Salman
Hamidani, UBS](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Alec Stais and
Christopher Lvoff,
Goldman Sachs](#)

[University Spotlight-
Worcester Polytechnic
Institute](#)

[SOA Board Approves
New e-Learning
Requirements](#)

[The Actuarial
Foundation's Caribbean
Actuarial Scholarship](#)

¡Hola! ¿Qué tal? Studying in Mexico, for a Change!

By Claire Bilodeau

Have any plans to travel abroad this school year? Claire Bilodeau shares the experiences of two Université Laval students who spent the Fall 2008 term in Mexico City, Mexico. [Full article >>](#)

Actuaries with an MBA—Is This the Path for You?

By Rachel Min

Are you considering getting your MBA along with your ASA or FSA? Rachel Min interviews Selina McDonald and Marilyn Dunnill, two actuaries who have earned an MBA degree and an FSA designation, to get their insight on how an MBA has helped them in their career. Read on to find out if pursuing an MBA is the right path for you! [Full article >>](#)

Meet Your Candidate Rep!

Our second candidate representative to be featured in our "Meet Your Candidate Rep" series is Russell Gao, ASA, MAAA. Russell is an actuarial associate at the Tillinghast Insurance Consulting Practice of Towers Perrin in Hartford, Conn. [Full article >>](#)

Workplace Etiquette Series: How NOT to Break the "Codes" at Work

By Jessica Kachur

As an actuary, you can break all the difficult numerical codes that you desire, but in order to ensure your career will be smooth and thriving ... never break the Dress Code. [Full article >>](#)

Actuaries Advancing Beyond: Salman Hamidani, UBS

By Wei Zou Ang

Next up in our series of interviews with actuaries working in non-traditional roles is Salman Hamidani, FSA. Salman worked with both Tillinghast and JPMorgan

Compensation and Benefit Strategies (formerly known as Chicago Consulting Actuaries) before helping UBS develop its Asset Liability Investment Solutions Group.

[Full article >>](#)

Actuaries Advancing Beyond: Alec Stais and Christopher Lvoff, Goldman Sachs

By Wei Zou Ang

Alex Stais and Christopher Lvoff both work with the Portfolio Solutions Group within Goldman Sachs's Investment Management Division. In this interview, they discuss how their actuarial background has helped them within their current positions and where they see the actuarial profession heading in the future. [Full article >>](#)

University Spotlight-Worcester Polytechnic Institute

By Russell Yang Gao

Russell Gao turns the spotlight on the well established actuarial program at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. [Full article >>](#)

SOA Board Approves New e-Learning Requirements

The SOA Board has approved new e-Learning requirements that will provide enhanced learning opportunities for FSAs. [Full article >>](#)

The Actuarial Foundation's Caribbean Actuarial Scholarship

Find out more about the scholarship here! [Full article >>](#)



A newsletter of the Society of Actuaries/Casualty Actuarial Society

2009 Summer Issue



Share



Printer-Friendly
Newsletter



Search Back Issues

In This Issue

[¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?](#)

[Studying in Mexico, for
a Change!](#)

[Actuaries with an MBA-
Is This the Path for
You?](#)

[Meet Your Candidate
Rep!](#)

[Workplace Etiquette
Series: How NOT to
Break the "Codes" at
Work](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Salman
Hamidani. UBS](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Alec Stais and
Christopher Lvoff,
Goldman Sachs](#)

[University Spotlight-
Worcester Polytechnic
Institute](#)

[SOA Board Approves
New e-Learning
Requirements](#)

[The Actuarial
Foundation's Caribbean
Actuarial Scholarship](#)

¡Hola! ¿Qué tal? Studying in Mexico, for a Change!

By Claire Bilodeau

In a previous issue of The Future Actuary, Shirley Song reported on her experience studying in London, England, at City University—far away from her home university, University of Waterloo (Ontario, Canada). Granted, studying in a different country entails a lot of changes and requires some serious adaptation skills. Though I was not an exchange student myself, and despite the fact that the British accent differs from the Canadian accent, I would imagine that the common language simplifies matters somewhat. That is not to say that the challenge is nonexistent: the university is different and the culture is different too. After all, what would be the point of going on an exchange if everything stayed the same?

Sophie Cantin and Mélissa Desjardins did not anticipate anything to be quite the same when they signed up to spend the Fall 2008 term at the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM) in Mexico City, Mexico. Until then, they had been taking actuarial science at Université Laval, in Québec City, Québec, Canada. Université Laval is a French-speaking institution in a pretty homogeneous city. At ITAM, courses are taught in Spanish. The different language alone is an important change.

A certain mastery of the language is required before leaving. Sophie and Mélissa, having set their sights on ITAM when they started their degree, had brushed up on their Spanish, which they had learnt in high school, and were eager to go to Mexico last fall. However, there is nothing quite like immersion, whatever the language, and they did have to adapt to the different accents ... and speaking speeds!

It helped that they were not the only exchange students at ITAM. In fact, ITAM seems to be a popular destination for people around the world and is well-organized to welcome them. Hence, in addition to getting to know Mexico first-hand, Sophie and Mélissa got to meet students from different countries. That international exposure happened not only at school but also in the home where they stayed, a guest house for exchange students.

Naturally, Sophie and Mélissa did not limit themselves to their living quarters and assigned classrooms! There was much to discover within a short distance (much shorter anyways than from their permanent homes!) and they did seize the opportunity to discover several of the different attractions and wonders Mexico boasts. After a

good week of learning and studying, they often would go on a weekend excursion, exploring the Zócalo, Puerto Escondido, Guanajuato, Veracruz, Taxco, and more!

I would not want to leave you with the impression that Sophie and Mélissa neglected their studies—quite the contrary! Their report card was nothing to be ashamed of, even for a local! Mélissa even passed a professional examination while in Mexico. Yet, writing such exams is not typical for Mexicans. In Mexico, the credentials are based on university education, as is common in mainland Europe. What is typical, though, is for actuarial students to be working for local insurance companies and consultants. That means that classes are either early or later in the day, allowing students to work during regular business hours.

Sophie and Mélissa told me there was a difference between professors who had written SOA/CAS exams and those who had not. There also was a difference between ITAM professors and Laval professors! While class participation is quite voluntary at Laval—which means it sometimes is rather limited when it is not altogether nonexistent—some ITAM professors make class participation a must, having specific students come to the blackboard! Besides, while confidentiality has become a constant concern at Laval, some ITAM professors return exams sorted by scores!

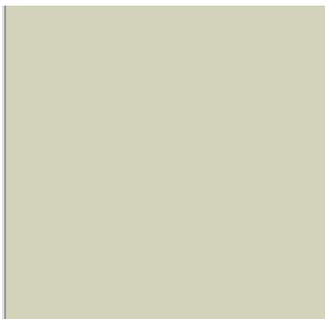
You may wonder how well Sophie and Mélissa knew one another before leaving for Mexico. In a group of around 100, it is tough to know everyone! They knew of one another, but did not share common circles and had decided to go to ITAM each on their own. After more than four months studying, living and traveling together, they came back good friends!

To anyone interested in studying abroad, here is the key advice Sophie and Mélissa have for you: check the requirements, brush up on any language skills you need and, above all, be openminded. If you are wellprepared and psyched up for change, I think you are wellpoised to reap the rewards of studying in an altogether different environment and come back home with the same sparks I saw in Sophie's and Mélissa's eyes when they spoke of their ITAM experience.

Perhaps you would love to study abroad and discover the world before graduating, but simply cannot for one reason or another. What can you do? If you cannot come to the world, perhaps you can let the world come to you! If your university welcomes foreign students and has a mentoring program, why not volunteer to serve as a mentor? While getting to know people of a different culture, you will get to rediscover your own culture.

Learning new languages opens doors to new cultures. If you are curious and ask questions, even visiting restaurants owned and operated by people from different backgrounds can launch you on a journey of discovery! Even Québec City, known to be quite homogeneous, has restaurants with different cuisines and spoken languages. Exploring the world, even in one's hometown, is often a matter of opening one's eyes and one's mind.

Incidentally, for those whose interest was piqued enough to read the whole text, you



may wonder what the non-English portion means. "¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?" is everyday Spanish for "Hi! How are you?" While that can be helpful when embarking on a worldwide journey, you will need more than that line to get around! So, what are you waiting for? Go ahead! Hit those books, practice a new language, and get ready to explore the world from a lesser distance! And when you come back, why not write a column about it for your favorite newsletter?! ¡Hasta la próxima! (Until next time!)



A newsletter of the Society of Actuaries/Casualty Actuarial Society

2009 Summer Issue



Share



Printer-Friendly
Newsletter



Search Back Issues

In This Issue

[¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?](#)

[Studying in Mexico, for
a Change!](#)

[Actuaries with an MBA-
Is This the Path for
You?](#)

[Meet Your Candidate
Rep!](#)

[Workplace Etiquette
Series: How NOT to
Break the "Codes" at
Work](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Salman
Hamidani, UBS](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Alec Stais and
Christopher Lvoff,
Goldman Sachs](#)

[University Spotlight-
Worcester Polytechnic
Institute](#)

[SOA Board Approves
New e-Learning
Requirements](#)

[The Actuarial
Foundation's Caribbean
Actuarial Scholarship](#)

Actuaries with an MBA—Is This the Path for You?

By Rachel Min

Due to the rigorous technical training that is required to become an actuary, actuaries are highly regarded for their logical and analytical abilities. However, while strong technical abilities are an essential quality of an actuary, there are other non-technical attributes such as communication and management skills that are also very important in the business environment. As actuaries fill executive roles at major insurance companies and become principals at international consulting firms, it is important to recognize that expanding the skill sets beyond the traditional technical abilities can create new opportunities for future actuaries. So what can young actuaries do to improve their non-technical skill sets? One possible option for aspiring actuaries to consider is to pursue a Master of Business Administration (MBA). However, before one blindly commits to another two to four years of education, one should realize that obtaining a MBA may not necessarily be the right career choice for everyone. This article attempts to provide some guidance to those who are considering the MBA option by interviewing actuaries in the working world who have obtained both an MBA degree and FSA designation.

Selina McDonald FSA, FCIA, is Manager of the Corporate Actuarial department at Munich Reinsurance Co., and Marilyn Dunnill, FSA, FCIA, is Director of the Actuarial Consulting Group at Sun Life Assurance of Canada.

Q: How did you happen to obtain both your MBA degree and FSA designation?

Selina: For me, I stumbled upon the actuarial profession quite by chance sometime after I had obtained my MBA. I got my Bachelor of Commerce and my MBA degree from St. Mary's University in Halifax, and then I taught for several years at various universities. After several years as a lecturer, I started considering my options in going back to school for a PhD or a Masters degree in another field that would be related to my MBA background. Then, it so happened that the Actuarial Science Master program at University of Western Ontario (UWO) was able to take me in and that's how I got into the actuarial profession.

Marilyn: I obtained my Bachelor of Commerce from University of Toronto, where I was introduced to the field of actuarial science through some of the courses I had taken. I knew I was going to pursue an actuarial career then but decided to stay in

school to do a MBA. Deciding to pursue the MBA was an easy choice for me because it was just continuation of school for a little over a year and I felt that the MBA training would be very helpful in learning more about some basic business background and preparing me for the working environment.

Q: How is training for MBA different than the actuarial training?

Selina: First of all, I think that actuarial training is largely done on your own, while much of MBA program involves working in a group and learning how to cooperate with other people. Communication is a very important component of the MBA training. You have to make presentations about your projects all the time and you have to be coherent and convincing in your delivery. I feel that actuarial studies involve just studying for your exams most of the time and you do not really learn how to analyze and communicate your results to others. I think that MBA training can really help actuarial science students with communicating, sharing and explaining technical ideas to other people who may not have the same technical background.

Marilyn: There have been some changes to the actuarial training recently such as the introduction of FAP modules, where students are now exposed to case studies and business issues. However, when I went through the actuarial training it was a strictly very technical training. I think that the MBA training really complemented my technical skill sets by providing me with tools to be able to tackle real life business problems.

The MBA training requires one to spend a lot of time working on group projects and researching various corporations. About 40 percent of the projects I worked on required fieldwork where I would go onsite to corporations and get involved in the actual business process. These projects were very interesting and I learned a great deal that you would never be able to learn from a textbook.

Doing case studies was a huge component of the MBA training. We had case studies where you would be given a lot of information, some with no relevance at all to the problem at hand. Other times, we would be given very limited information to solve a problem. These case studies were practice for the real life business cases when you would need to be able to pick out the key information or have to work with limited information to solve the problem. Also, most of the projects involved a lot of teamwork. By working through these projects, you learn how to manage teams; how to motivate people, how to layout plans and deadlines, how to tell which roles would fit who.

Another key element of MBA training that became very useful for me is the knowledge of the accounting and of the asset side. Nowadays, actuaries are becoming more and more exposed to the asset side of an insurance company through projects like implementing International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) or working on economic capital. MBA training gives you a great understanding of the whole balance sheet and how different items on the balance sheet interact with each other. Other interesting and useful component of MBA training was taking courses such as Marketing and Business Law that gives you broader perspectives on

business operations.

Q: What roles have you worked in and how has getting your MBA degree helped you in those roles?

Selina: While I was completing my actuarial science studies at UWO, I was able to work as an intern in London Life's Asset Liability Management (ALM) area. It was a very new and interesting area with many talented people. The MBA background is especially helpful in the ALM area because the finance courses you take in a MBA program helps you to understand the different types of assets that you are dealing with and teaches you how to manage them.

Right now, in my role as a manager of the Corporate Actuarial department, my MBA knowledge is useful when performing financial analysis of how a certain action from the senior management will impact the bottom line. When management changes their strategic direction, it will have an impact on the business. The MBA background can teach you to develop different and broader perspective of the business, which may allow you to better understand and analyze different business situations. For instance, when trying to make a decision about whether or not to take on a certain block of business, one might only look at the numbers; how much embedded value and how much profit the business will generate. However, there are other aspects that you need to take into consideration, such as how will taking on the business impact the relationship with the client and change the market positioning of your company.

Marilyn: I work in the Actuarial Consulting Group at Sun Life, where I work as an internal consultant to different departments in the company. So, just like any other consultants, all the work I do is project based. The project management and report writing training I received through my MBA is definitely very helpful in this role. I am currently working on a project related to capital management with the Treasury department, and for this project my supervisor and co-workers are mostly accountants. I want to point this out because the perspectives of accountants may greatly differ from those of actuaries. Without my MBA background, I feel that I may have had some trouble understanding some of the accounting jargons and communicating with my co-workers. I also find that my MBA training really helps me identify and understand what the important issues are for the company. The reports that get generated from the Treasury department are read by the most senior executives of the company and sometimes even external audiences such as shareholders or stock analysts. These reports are important as they include all the different business groups and they contain issues about capital management, which directly affects the company's profits. Since the audiences are non-actuaries, the reports cannot just be based on actuarial analysis and they need to offer different business perspectives. As an actuary, being able to form a perspective of someone who is not an actuary is a hugely beneficial asset as you get to understand the insurance business from the inside out. Having the actuarial background lets you understand all the specific actuarial issues related to different business groups, and the MBA background can enable you to put all the information together and see the big picture of the whole business operation. This combination will enable you to make

better business decisions.

Q: Given the intensive commitment involved, would you recommend that actuarial students consider pursuing a MBA degree? If so, what type of students do you think would benefit the most from obtaining a MBA?

Selina: The problem with recommending the MBA path to students who are looking to improve their communication skills is that sometimes mastering a skill cannot be easily achieved by taking a course. The MBA training will certainly make you practice and will force you to learn those skills but some may find that public speaking is really not for them.

However, MBA training will certainly provide you with different and broader perspectives than the ones you may acquire from actuarial training. Especially if you want to move into a managerial role, the MBA training will help you understand what is expected and required of a manager. It will teach you how to manage people, look at business differently, and develop strategic goals for the company.

It is important to realize that having a MBA degree doesn't really prove that you have expertise in business. It shows people that you have the necessary skill sets and are able to learn, but having valid work experience is probably more important than having a MBA degree. So, it may be beneficial to work for a while and then go back to school to do your MBA.

My final advice for the actuarial students would be to ask yourself what your career goal is. Can you see yourself as a manager, VP or CEO? If the business side does not interest you, then a MBA is probably not for you because the business side does require a certain type of personality. If you are more interested in the financial and investment side, then you might consider pursuing a CFA designation. If you are not sure, then I recommend that you work for a while and see how people progress in their careers in your company. If you think that a MBA can help you acquire the skills needed to advance into the career paths that you want, then pursue it.

Marilyn: Like all knowledge, you could probably gain some of the skills that you learn from a MBA degree through work experience or sometimes through the readings you have to do for SOA exams. However, I still think that MBA training is a very valuable tool to have, especially as you get into higher managerial positions that require broader business perspectives. MBA training will teach you to be able to develop perspectives beyond actuarial issues and it will also help you when dealing with non-actuaries such as company executives or accountants. One piece of advice for the aspiring actuaries is that you probably won't want to do MBA at the same time as your actuarial exams. A good time to do your MBA would probably be after finishing your SOA exams and having worked for a few years. I think at that point you will know what skill sets you need to develop and you will be able to derive more out of the MBA training experience.



A newsletter of the Society of Actuaries/Casualty Actuarial Society

2009 Summer Issue



Share



Printer-Friendly
Newsletter



Search Back Issues

In This Issue

[¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?
Studying in Mexico, for
a Change!](#)

[Actuaries with an MBA-
Is This the Path for
You?](#)

[Meet Your Candidate
Rep!](#)

[Workplace Etiquette
Series: How NOT to
Break the "Codes" at
Work](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Salman
Hamidani, UBS](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Alec Stais and
Christopher Lvoff,
Goldman Sachs](#)

[University Spotlight-
Worcester Polytechnic
Institute](#)

[SOA Board Approves
New e-Learning
Requirements](#)

[The Actuarial
Foundation's Caribbean
Actuarial Scholarship](#)

Meet Your Candidate Rep!

Our second candidate representative to be featured in our "Meet Your Candidate Rep" series is Russell Gao. Russell is an actuarial associate at the Tillinghast Insurance Consulting Practice of Towers Perrin in Hartford, Conn. Russell has worked for Towers Perrin since 2007. He is an Associate of the Society of Actuaries and a Member of the American Academy of Actuaries.

When did you decide you wanted to be an actuary?

When I was a sophomore in high school, I decided that I wanted to study actuarial science in college.

What influenced this decision?

Now that I think about it, chance always plays a part in our life! One of my mom's friends was a scientist in Australia. He recommended the career to me. After reading the articles he sent me and conducting some research myself, I thought it was a great career indeed. I really enjoyed the probability class I was taking at the time, and I also liked my economics and computer science class. Putting it together, I thought actuarial science would be a perfect major for me in college.

Where did you go to college, and what is your educational background?

I completed my secondary education in a traditional high school in China. I searched the SOA's Web site for undergraduate actuarial programs. Since there are very few programs in China, I came to the United States to study at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, majoring in Actuarial Mathematics.

What classes did you take in college that helped prepare you for your career? What class was most helpful?

Broadly speaking, I find the mathematics and business classes most helpful for my career. In the mathematics category, the most useful class is by far interest theory. It established the fundamental concept of time value of money for me. This concept is crucial in studying many other subjects, such as finance and investment. Applied statistics, probability and life contingencies are also very helpful in day-to-day work.

In the business category, the most useful class I have taken is organization behavior. It showed me how a modern organization works, how people interact with each other, and how to be effective in different environments. Investment, corporate finance and accounting are also very useful in day to day work.

What classes outside of mathematics and statistics (such as communications) were helpful?

At Worcester Polytechnic Institute, students are required to take five humanity courses that are related to a single area (e.g., philosophy or history) and write a thesis on it. I decided to take up writing, as I enjoyed writing in high school, and I was often told that it is an important business skill. I worked as a writing tutor in college and really enjoyed the opportunity to understand other people and to help them express their ideas.

One course I wish I had taken was graphic design. As actuaries, we often need to present complex numerical information, sometimes to a non-technical audience. I found Edward Tufte's *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* enlightening.

Have you ever got a 5 on an exam? How did you get over it?

I have got a five on two separate exams. To be honest, it is really frustrating. Sometimes you even want to ask for a second grading. My advice is to do your favorite activity to get over it: take a run, go to a concert, read a book ... Then assess your shortcomings objectively. You are not that far. Maybe there is one or two types of questions you were not very comfortable with last time. You can do it this time. Focus on the future, as you cannot change the past.

What practice area are you working in?

I work in the life insurance and financial services practice within Tillinghast, the insurance consulting business of Towers Perrin. I enjoy the diversity of my work, ranging from pricing and reserving for variable annuities to conducting market research for a start-up insurance company.



A newsletter of the Society of Actuaries/Casualty Actuarial Society

2009 Summer Issue



Share



Printer-Friendly
Newsletter



Search Back Issues

In This Issue

[¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?](#)

[Studying in Mexico, for
a Change!](#)

[Actuaries with an MBA-
Is This the Path for
You?](#)

[Meet Your Candidate
Rep!](#)

[Workplace Etiquette
Series: How NOT to
Break the "Codes" at
Work](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Salman
Hamidani, UBS](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Alec Stais and
Christopher Lvoff,
Goldman Sachs](#)

[University Spotlight-
Worcester Polytechnic
Institute](#)

[SOA Board Approves
New e-Learning
Requirements](#)

[The Actuarial
Foundation's Caribbean
Actuarial Scholarship](#)

Workplace Etiquette Series: How NOT to Break the "Codes" at Work

By Jessica Kachur

Working as an actuary requires an individual to display superior technical abilities. No matter which of the actuarial paths you choose after graduating college, you will constantly be relied upon to solve complex numerical puzzles. The more experience you gain as an actuary will enhance your abilities to break these complicated number codes. Although enjoying mathematical problems and being able to break the number codes associated with those problems is a key component to being a happy and successful actuary, there is a different underlying code that an actuary does NOT want to break at work. This is the Dress Code.

In order to lay a framework, I will start by providing some common workplace dress code terms and definitions (information from Wikipedia):

Business Attire: Dress code that calls for an individual to wear a suit. This should be accompanied by long-sleeved shirt with a necktie for men and a blouse for women. This used to be the dominant dress code for professional employees; however, this has been replaced in many organizations by business casual attire.

Business Casual Attire: Dress code that calls for an individual to dress neatly and professionally. This is less formal than the aforementioned business attire. Over the years, this has currently become the most popular dress code for the majority of white-collar professionals. According to Wikipedia, 43 percent of white-collar, non-self employed workers in the United States opt for business casual attire on a daily basis.

Casual Attire: Dress code that calls for an individual to dress comfortably. This is less formal than both the business and business casual attire previously discussed. Although this is not the typical daily attire for white-collar professionals, companies will often offer a "Casual Day" for its employees.

Although I have provided broad definitions of the dress code policies that you will likely encounter during your career as an actuary, it is important to remember that each company has its own unique definition and interpretation of the dress code. The best way to ensure that your attire is within adequate standards of your company's dress code is to read about it in your employee handbook. This is available to all

employees and is provided to you upon being hired as a full-time employee or as an intern. Your employee handbook may contain a list of items that are unacceptable. If you are still unsure if something is appropriate or not you can observe how your coworkers dress. For example, if your employer consistently offers employees the option to wear jeans on Friday, you may want to skip the first one and note how others in the office are dressing. This will help you feel more confident in the attire that you choose for the next casual Friday.

There could be many direct and indirect consequences for dressing improperly at work. Let's pretend that you did not check your employee handbook or consult with your Human Resource department and decided on to wear your favorite college T-shirt, your fashionable ripped-jeans, and your tennis shoes on your company's casual day. When you walk into the office you see that everyone else is wearing jeans (with no holes), a dress shirt, and dress shoes. Initially your first consequence is feeling out of place. As the day goes on, more and more people start to notice your outfit the next consequence you will encounter is possibly having your coworkers making comments behind your back. As an actuary you will be judged based upon your technical abilities, however, as a professional you will also be judged upon your appearance and your ability to present yourself in a suitable manner. Visual impressions matter. You do not want to surrender the hard-work that you have put in to become actuary by having coworkers and clients undermine your abilities based upon the inappropriate clothes you have worn. Those are two indirect consequences that you would experience; however, there are other direct consequences. For example, some companies will give their employees a warning if they do something not in-line with standard policy. This may entail having an uncomfortable discussion with your supervisor or Human Resource director. If the company that you are working for is not as forgiving then you ultimately could lose your job or if you are working as an intern, you may never be considered for a full-time position.

As a final point, remember a good rule to follow before going to the workplace is that it is better to over-dress than under-dress. If on your first day you are not sure whether the dress policy is business or business casual opt for wearing a suit. You only get one chance to make a first impression, so make it count. Always dress for success, because when you look good, you feel good, and you will work to the best of your abilities. When you are studying and working as an actuary you can break all the difficult numerical codes that you desire, but in order to ensure your career will be smooth and thriving ... never break the *Dress Code*.



A newsletter of the Society of Actuaries/Casualty Actuarial Society

2009 Summer Issue



Share



Printer-Friendly
Newsletter



Search Back Issues

In This Issue

[¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?](#)

[Studying in Mexico, for
a Change!](#)

[Actuaries with an MBA-
Is This the Path for
You?](#)

[Meet Your Candidate
Rep!](#)

[Workplace Etiquette
Series: How NOT to
Break the "Codes" at
Work](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Salman
Hamidani, UBS](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Alec Stais and
Christopher Lvoff,
Goldman Sachs](#)

[University Spotlight-
Worcester Polytechnic
Institute](#)

[SOA Board Approves
New e-Learning
Requirements](#)

[The Actuarial
Foundation's Caribbean
Actuarial Scholarship](#)

Actuaries Advancing Beyond: Salman Hamidani, UBS

By *Wei Zou Ang*

Salman Hamidani is currently an associate director within UBS Global Asset Management's Asset Liability Investment Solutions Group. As an actuarial science graduate from Drake University, Salman worked with both Tillinghast and JPMorgan Compensation and Benefit Strategies (formerly known as Chicago Consulting Actuaries) before helping UBS develop its Asset Liability Investment Solutions Group. Salman is an FSA and also pursuing the CFA designation. He shares with us his career experiences and thoughts through the interview below:

Wei: Please describe UBS and your responsibilities at UBS?

Salman: UBS is a global banking institution with 3 main divisions: Wealth Management, Investment Banking, and Global Asset Management. I work in the Asset Liability Investment Solutions group which falls under Global Asset Management. We focus on analyzing investment strategies for pension plans and developing and implementing investment solutions that target plans' liabilities as their investment benchmark.

Wei: What is Asset-liability management?

Salman: Many people interpret ALM and LDI (liability driven investing) in different ways. To us, LDI quite simply recognizes the liability as the investment benchmark for a plan's assets. Portfolio risks and returns then are assessed relative to the liability.

Wei: Could you describe a normal day on the job?

Salman: As a team within the global asset management division, we work with plans and their consultants to develop, implement, and manage LDI solutions. Typically, the process starts with someone from our sales team contacting prospects about solutions and advice we can offer. Next, our team is brought in to analyze and customize a solution to reflect a plan sponsor's specific circumstances. If the client agrees to implement our solutions, we could manage all or part of the plan's assets.

In addition to providing LDI based advice and portfolio management, our group is also involved in research about current market trends, writing papers, developing marketing materials and educating both clients and internal staff about LDI.

Wei: Could you describe your career path?

Salman: As an actuarial science graduate from Drake University, I interned at Tillinghast, TowersPerrin and was immediately attracted to the challenges of consulting. I started my career with CCA Strategies in retirement consulting after graduation. While at CCA, I realized that the major challenges facing the pension industry stemmed from the funding of the pension plans. I believed that in order for Defined Benefit plans to survive under current regulations, we would have to address the way DB assets are managed. So I started to look for projects doing ALM studies for pension plans within CCA. As I learnt more about the field, I found myself more interested in learning about the assets side too. Additionally, going through the actuarial exams, I took the Investment course for my Course 8 exams and began to develop a skill set that would allow me the opportunity to transition into asset management. When the UBS opportunity came by, I felt it was a very good fit and I have been working at UBS ever since.

Wei: What are the biggest challenges of your job?

Salman: Everything we do right now is relatively new and this has presented me with a lot of opportunities as well as challenges. Good ideas are prevalent everywhere and lot of times it comes down to execution. So the challenge of our group is not just to come up with new solutions but then also to convince the sales professionals, investment consultants, investment committees and pension plan sponsors to adopt the same—and here I think a consulting background can come in very handy.

Wei: How has an actuarial background helped you with your job?

Salman: Having worked previously as a pension consulting actuary, I came in as an actuary on the liability side, so my actuarial experiences have directly helped me with my current role at UBS. However, after transitioning, I have had to learn a lot on my own as well. I feel that the one way the rigorous actuarial examination process prepares you more than anything else is the ability to learn new information quickly and effectively. In my current role right now, a lot of things are unprecedented, so you need to be resourceful and be self-sufficient to implement your own ideas.

Wei: What do you like best about your job?

Salman: Since we have a small group dedicated to LDI in the U.S., I have exposure to everything involving Asset Liability Investments at UBS Global Asset Management. From portfolio management decisions, interacting with clients and internal staff, to developing products and marketing them, I am exposed to all aspects of my job and this has kept it very interesting.

Wei: What attracted you towards an actuarial education in the first place?

Salman: To an extent, I was attracted to the actuarial career path by the challenge and exclusivity of the profession. However as I progressed within the examination

process, I felt that the general skill set that you developed within the actuarial field is widely applicable, and it helped you develop the ability to effectively learn on your own. So even if you start your career as an actuarial consultant, you know that you can easily switch to another profession because you have already developed the discipline to learn new things very quickly.

Wei: How do people follow your footsteps?

Salman: One thing I discovered was that I was always a little more interested in the investments side, that was why I double-majored in finance as well. I started off in pension consulting, but after four years, I started to change my skill set towards investments. So if you are an actuary and are more inclined towards investments, try talking to asset managers or investment banks as actuaries are becoming increasingly prominent in these non-traditional places.

Wei: Where do you see the actuarial profession heading towards in the future?

Salman: On the traditional pension side, I can see more actuaries going into asset management. A lot of traditional actuaries I know have started taking the CFA examinations and I also expect actuarial consulting companies to start investing in the infrastructure for asset-liability management.

Wei: If you had one piece of advice for college students, what would it be?

Salman: I would say don't limit yourself to the traditional actuarial career opportunities and try to talk to as many people as possible. However, if you are looking for a traditional actuarial career, then make sure you know whether you want to go into insurance or consulting.



2009 Summer Issue



Share

Printer-Friendly
Newsletter

Search Back Issues

In This Issue

[¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?
Studying in Mexico, for
a Change!](#)

[Actuaries with an MBA-
Is This the Path for
You?](#)

[Meet Your Candidate
Rep!](#)

[Workplace Etiquette
Series: How NOT to
Break the "Codes" at
Work](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Salman
Hamidani. UBS](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Alec Stais and
Christopher Lvoff,
Goldman Sachs](#)

[University Spotlight-
Worcester Polytechnic
Institute](#)

[SOA Board Approves
New e-Learning
Requirements](#)

[The Actuarial
Foundation's Caribbean
Actuarial Scholarship](#)

Actuaries Advancing Beyond: Alec Stais and Christopher Lvoff, Goldman Sachs

By *Wei Zou Ang*

Alec Stais, ASA, is a managing director with Goldman Sachs, a global bank holding company that engages in investment banking, securities services, and investment management, and the co-head of the Portfolio Solutions Group within Goldman's Investment Management Division. Christopher Lvoff, ASA, is an associate within Alec's team. The Portfolio Solutions Group focuses on providing its clients with holistic investment solutions, such as alternatives outsourcing programs focusing on private equity funds and/or hedge funds, and fiduciary management services. Many of AIMS' clients are large defined benefit pension funds with targeted investment returns and substantial future pension liabilities.

Private equity funds are investment funds that acquire controlling equity stakes in companies with hopes of improving their operations and selling them off later to make a profit, while hedge funds are registered investment funds that typically use a wide variety of strategies, including leverage and long/short investing to pursue investment gains. Fiduciary management is a service provided to companies who wish to outsource managing their aggregate pension or foundation portfolios.

Wei: Starting from college, how did your career path lead you to your current position with Goldman Sachs?

Alec Stais: After graduating from Haverford College, I worked for MetLife under its investment management division for around 10 years. After leaving MetLife, I joined Goldman Sachs as a vice president within its asset management arm as I saw working at an investment bank as a great way for me to not only leverage my prior experiences with MetLife, but to also work with a greater range of investment products. Along the way, I also obtained an MBA from New York University Stern Business School and an ASA designation. If an investment track was offered by the SOA back then, I probably would have followed through with an FSA.

Chris Lvoff: As a junior, I interned at Hewitt Associates and knew that I wanted to work in actuarial consulting. After graduation, I chose to work for Towers Perrin within their pension consulting arm for three years in Philadelphia before moving onto Goldman Sachs Asset Management. Since many of our clients are pension funds, I

was able to translate my experiences on the liability side of pension funds to better serve our clients on the asset side. At Towers Perrin, I obtained my ASA designation and I am currently working on finishing the remaining requirements before getting my FSA designation. In addition, I am working towards earning a CFA charter.

Wei: Why did you make the career move to a non-traditional area of practice?

Alec Stais: The financial mathematics portion of the actuarial examinations really opened my eyes. I was very excited about the financial side of being an actuary and decided to get involved with asset management. As an entry level analyst, I worked with MetLife Investment Management, so the shift from MetLife to Goldman Sachs was somewhat of a natural career progression for me. I also knew that Goldman Sachs had always been successful in everything they did and are a great brand on Wall Street. I decided to work for Goldman Sachs and have not regretted that decision ever since.

Chris Lvoff: After obtaining my ASA, it seemed like a natural point to question what I most enjoy working on and what else is out there. I knew defined benefit pension plans would continue to be a critical part of the retirement landscape, and thought one of the greatest challenges would be how to close the funding gap between assets and liabilities. I began looking at asset management, and after getting in touch with Alec at Goldman Sachs I knew it was the place I wanted to be. I was lucky Alec was very much aware of my actuarial background and fortunate he hired me.

Wei: What has been the biggest challenge working at Goldman?

Alec Stais: I think managing my time and understanding how to handle the many competing projects and opportunities that present themselves every day. Goldman is an incredibly stimulating place to work but you need to manage the complexity and not let it overwhelm you.

Chris Lvoff: Lately, in the volatile market environment, the greatest challenge is continuing to help our clients think how to manage the risk in their portfolios and how to reach their investment goals. In this environment there are opportunities out there and we need to ensure our clients are able to take advantage of them.

Wei: How has an actuarial education or background helped you with your respective jobs?

Alec Stais: the training and discipline of the exam program and my early job assignments showed me that I could make a career out of my math aptitude. Additionally, my first manager at MetLife was an actuary who really challenged me how to extend my knowledge base and was an incredibly supportive mentor.

Chris Lvoff: What you learn through the actuarial exams gives you a framework and discipline around which many different situations and problems can be analyzed. For example, simulation is a tool that I use more and more in my current role that came directly from my actuarial education.

Wei: How has working at Goldman Sachs been different from your previous actuarial position?

Chris Lvoff: There are similarities and differences between working at Towers and Goldman, but I would say the biggest differences would be the level of focus on clients and the culture at Goldman Sachs. Starting at Towers Perrin, your goal is to develop your technical skills, provide your client with advice or valuation work and pass your actuarial exams all in a day's work. At Goldman Sachs, the goal is also to provide client's with advice or service to address their problems, but also to help act and implement that advice. The client always comes first and every person makes that a priority. As a result the work can be relentless, but you never feel as if you are working alone. When you are part of a project, you are involved from start to finish and each persons' input is expected to make the end product better regardless of level. Everyone I have met at Goldman is extremely intelligent and motivated which creates an environment where the people you work with are always there to challenge you and help you with your job no matter what time or day.

Wei: What do you like best about working at Goldman Sachs?

Alec Stais: The firm pays a lot of focus in giving every employee the necessary experience to develop professionally and in making sure everyone is constantly challenged on the job. There is always opportunity for people to grow if they are willing to put in that extra effort. I personally always find myself working on something fairly different every 2 years or so, while still focusing on my specialty within asset management, which has kept my job very interesting even after 12 years.

Chris Lvoff: The environment and the people. Goldman Sachs is such a dynamic firm that there great opportunities available, many from unanticipated places. Coupled with the support and help of colleagues as well as interesting projects, creates an engaging and satisfying work environment.

Wei: Where do you see the actuarial profession heading towards in the future?

Alec Stais: I think actuaries can do a lot more in modeling risk and uncertainty in other industries beyond insurance and investing. Two examples would be sports and entertainment. There is a ton of resources allocated within those industries that could be better managed with more scientific approaches.

Chris Lvoff: Something I think is very interesting and may be a bigger focus in the future is enterprise risk management and changing how we look at risk from more than just traditional sources. Pension plans in particular need to understand the true economic cost of their plans as opposed to the accounting/regulatory cost and how to manage it. There are immense challenges out there from designing government supported retirement systems to understanding demographic trends and their impacts that actuaries can play a significant role is solving.

Wei: If you had one advice to give college graduates, what would it

be?

Alec Stais: When you start working out of college in an entry level position, always put in 100 percent into your job. Even if an advancement opportunity comes up, you won't get the call if you aren't performing as well as you can in your current responsibilities.

Chris Lvoff: It is hard to know what you want to do coming out of college, but focus on things that hold your interest. Talk to as many people as necessary and use the resources around you to see where those interests can be applied.



A newsletter of the Society of Actuaries/Casualty Actuarial Society

2009 Summer Issue



Share



Printer-Friendly
Newsletter



Search Back Issues

In This Issue

[¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?](#)

[Studying in Mexico, for
a Change!](#)

[Actuaries with an MBA-
Is This the Path for
You?](#)

[Meet Your Candidate
Rep!](#)

[Workplace Etiquette
Series: How NOT to
Break the "Codes" at
Work](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Salman
Hamidani, UBS](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Alec Stais and
Christopher Lvoff,
Goldman Sachs](#)

[University Spotlight-
Worcester Polytechnic
Institute](#)

[SOA Board Approves
New e-Learning
Requirements](#)

[The Actuarial
Foundation's Caribbean
Actuarial Scholarship](#)

University Spotlight–Worcester Polytechnic Institute

By Russell Yang Gao

Founded in 1865, Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) was one of the earliest technological universities in the United States. Its alumni invented the first liquid rocket, stainless steel, the first practical air bag system, among other world-changing discoveries. The Mathematical Science department is one of its oldest departments, since mathematics is the foundation of virtually all scientific and engineering work. Built on the strong mathematic tradition, the actuarial program is probably WPI's best-kept secret.

The Actuarial Program

The actuarial program at WPI is relatively small, typically enrolling 20–30 students. Compared with programs in larger universities, the program at WPI has far smaller lecture sizes and allows more interaction between professors and students.

Although small, the actuarial program at WPI is well-established. It is listed on the Society of Actuaries' (SOA) Web site as an Advanced Undergraduate Program. Built in the Mathematical Science department, the program has a strong mathematical curriculum, covering interest theory, actuarial mathematics, risk theory, and loss models. These courses can prepare students for the preliminary exams offered by the SOA, i.e., Exam P, FM, MLC, and C. The program also requires courses that count towards the Applied Statistics and Economics VEE requirement. In addition, some students have taken a graduate course to satisfy the Time Series VEE requirement.

Prof. Jon Abraham is the Actuarial Program Coordinator at WPI. He is a fellow of the Society of Actuaries and a member of the American Academy of Actuaries. He brings extensive industry experience in teaching and advising students. In 2007, he won the Board of Trustees Award for Outstanding Academic Advising at WPI.

In addition to class-room learning, students also benefit from many practical courses the Career Development Center and the Library at WPI provide: resume writing, interviewing, Excel, and Access. Many students also find internships and co-ops through the Career Development Center.

The Project-Based Learning and Real-World Connection

A key characteristic of WPI's undergraduate education is its project-based learning philosophy. Students often need to complete projects for individual courses, many of which are drawn from real-life problems. In addition, students need to complete three important requirements to graduate: Humanities and Arts, Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP), and Major Qualifying Project (MQP).

The Humanities and Arts requirement ensures that students appreciate the depth and breadth of human experience. For the depth requirement, students need to take three humanity courses that are in the same area (e.g., Philosophy or History) that concludes in an inquiry-based seminar or a practicum (such as a theatre performance).

The IQP asks students to explore the interaction between science and society. Students often complete this project in teams and participate in an annual competition. The winning projects range from installing solar panels for a village in Thailand and exploring the impact of solar technology in that village to building energy-efficient homes in Namibia.

The MQP asks students to apply what they learned in their major courses to solve a theoretical or practical problem. For actuarial students, it offers a great opportunity to connect with the real world. Some of actuarial students' MQPs include: pricing long-term care insurance, pricing auto insurance, predictive modeling, and pricing credit default swaps. Many of the MQPs have corporate sponsors, which provide strong support and guidance for students to complete their research. According to Prof. Abraham, recent corporate sponsors include John Hancock, Hanover, Towers Perrin, Hewitt Associates, Fidelity, Banc of America Securities, and Morgan Stanley.

Besides completing a project at school, many students also gain real-world experience through a summer internship or a co-op. According to Prof. Abraham, in the past few years students have interned at John Hancock, Hanover, Towers Perrin, Hewitt Associates, Fidelity, Sun Life, Aetna, Hartford Life, Hartford P&C, Travelers, Metropolitan Life, Swiss Re, and Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Through various project work in and out of college, students not only learn how to apply theory to practical problems, but also how to solve problems independently and how to work with others. Alumni often feel that the education prepared them well for today's challenges in a fast, complex, competitive and cooperative workplace.

Would you like to see your college or university's actuarial science program featured in The Future Actuary? Contact Kathryn Baker, Senior Communications Associate at the SOA at kbaker@soa.org.



A newsletter of the Society of Actuaries/Casualty Actuarial Society

2009 Summer Issue



Printer-Friendly
Newsletter



Search Back Issues

In This Issue

[¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?
Studying in Mexico, for
a Change!](#)

[Actuaries with an MBA-
Is This the Path for
You?](#)

[Meet Your Candidate
Rep!](#)

[Workplace Etiquette
Series: How NOT to
Break the "Codes" at
Work](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Salman
Hamidani. UBS](#)

[Actuaries Advancing
Beyond: Alec Stais and
Christopher Lvoff,
Goldman Sachs](#)

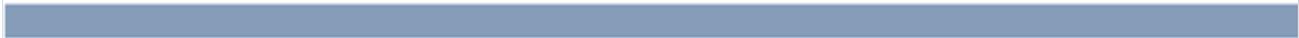
[University Spotlight-
Worcester Polytechnic
Institute](#)

[SOA Board Approves
New e-Learning
Requirements](#)

[The Actuarial
Foundation's Caribbean
Actuarial Scholarship](#)

SOA Board Approves New e-Learning Requirements

The SOA Board has approved new e-Learning requirements that will provide enhanced learning opportunities for FSAs. For more information on these requirements, please visit [e-Learning Modules](#).

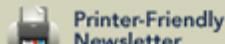


© 2009 Society of Actuaries
475 N. Martingale Rd., Ste. 600, Schaumburg, Illinois 60173 p: 847.706.3500 f: 847.706.3599



A newsletter of the Society of Actuaries/Casualty Actuarial Society

2009 Summer Issue



In This Issue

[¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?](#)

[Studying in Mexico, for a Change!](#)

[Actuaries with an MBA- Is This the Path for You?](#)

[Meet Your Candidate Rep!](#)

[Workplace Etiquette Series: How NOT to Break the "Codes" at Work](#)

[Actuaries Advancing Beyond: Salman Hamidani, UBS](#)

[Actuaries Advancing Beyond: Alec Stais and Christopher Lvoff, Goldman Sachs](#)

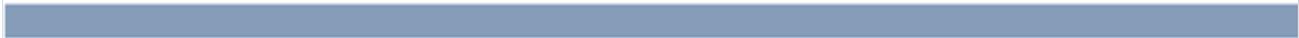
[University Spotlight- Worcester Polytechnic Institute](#)

[SOA Board Approves New e-Learning Requirements](#)

[The Actuarial Foundation's Caribbean Actuarial Scholarship](#)

The Actuarial Foundation's Caribbean Actuarial Scholarship

The Caribbean Actuarial Scholarship was established in memory of Basil L. and Monica G. Virtue by their son-in-law, S. Michael McLaughlin, an actuary who graduated from the University of the West Indies. This scholarship is intended to be an annual award to UWI actuarial student(s) who demonstrate a strong record of accomplishment, leadership qualities and a commitment to becoming an actuary. The 2009 scholarship deadline has passed, but please visit [The Actuarial Foundation](#).



© 2009 Society of Actuaries
475 N. Martingale Rd., Ste. 600, Schaumburg, Illinois 60173 p: 847.706.3500 f: 847.706.3599