

Entering the pharmaceutical industry – a new graduate perspective

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Introduction

Like a number of pharmaceutical companies, AstraZeneca has a graduate program to introduce new university graduates to the industry. We have implemented this across many parts of the organization, as well as many geographical locations.

For this poster we are going to talk about the journey into statistical programming through the eyes of four graduates. Three are from our Polish office in Warsaw, and one is from our US office in Gaithersburg, Maryland. Two are from the 2020 class and have been doing project work for nearly a year. The other two are from the class of 2021 and have just completed their training and are starting to program on their first studies.

Learning Path

The AstraZeneca Biometrics Graduate Program is an international entry-level program for recent college graduates, and career path changers. The program fosters innovation and talent development for AstraZeneca. The program recruits from many different backgrounds to diversify talent and critical thinking abilities.

During the program, soft skills, technical skills and corporate knowledge are developed through workshops, seminars and real-world examples. Throughout the two-year program, graduates begin to find where they can succeed within the industry and the company. Some become SAS programmers, and others find other programming and technical skills to guide them down a different career path.

Introduction to the Company and Courses

Mentoring and Mentee – Relationship/Network Exposure

- a. Meet Manager/Buddy
Creating Relationships with co-workers
- c. Find a mentor of a career path you would want to travel down
Learn from those that have been with the company or in the industry
2. Introduction AZ/industry seminars
 - a. Learn about all facets of the company and industry
Hear from experts in all areas of the company
3. Software Training
 - a. Half Day two-month program on SAS
 - b. Optional R training
4. CDISC
5. Soft skills training
Entimice (In House Software) Training Project
7. Study work

Starting Work

After finishing the SAS, CDISC and other introductory training, all the Graduates were excited to start working on a real study. According to the plan, we were assigned a study which was just starting, and which the team had already been introduced to. Thanks to that, we could participate in all programming processes from the very beginning of the study. We could learn the study programmer's work step by step, with long study timelines, and experience various tasks under the supervision of our mentor.

The first steps were demanding - everything was new and seemed complicated. However, the more time we spent on the study, the more knowledge about clinical trials we gained. All the graduate program training gave us basic, solid knowledge and the skills needed to start in the role of a study programmer. Mentoring meetings and working closely with experienced programmers allowed for our further development, and it was a big part of our journey to become independent programmers.

Ola

An amazing opportunity for graduates and people with no practical experience to quickly start their professional career in pharmaceutical industry.

Great work environment- helpful and kind people

Study Work

CDISC Training

Martyna

Very practical SAS training tailored to pharmaceutical industry standards

Training project simulated our daily programmer tasks

Daniel

Great opportunity to work with programmers outside of the US.
Nice to share my R knowledge.

Marta

Mentoring – a great opportunity to learn from experienced programmers

BIG meetings – guest lectures and integration with graduates from other teams

Feedback and Changes

From the 2020 class, there were a number of suggestions that were implemented for the 2021 class:

- More time to finish exercises and discuss possible solutions
- A big gap between finishing classes and the project work starting
- CDISC training too early in the program

From the 2021 class the comments included:

- Would like a single point of contact for all graduates
- Record seminars for those in other time zones, or to review
- Have prior graduates be buddies with current graduates – share their experiences with the new class.
- Group graduates by site for more in person collaborations.

Conclusion

The new graduate program at AstraZeneca has provided a great opportunity for new university graduates to enter the pharmaceutical industry and statistical programming. This is another way to attract talent to the organization.

To continue the success of this program, the company needs to tune and tailor the program. By having a built-in feedback process, we can keep the great parts of the program and use the graduates' feedback to improve the rest.

With this feedback we have learned that there is strength in teams, new starters need experienced mentors, a diverse team is a thriving team, and that each new graduate class can always find ways to improve a process.

SAS /R Training

Industry Overview

Company Overview