



Montana Student and Graduate Profile

After working in the Antarctic for 11 years providing logistical support to research scientists, Sarah Gundlach was ready to master something new. When she returned home to Frenchtown, Montana, Sarah completed several courses at a local technical college. One of these was a one-week program on routers and switches during which she learned about the Cisco® Networking Academy® and Cisco certifications. She was so interested in the material that after the one-week course, she actually tried to pass the Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA®) exam. “Imagine my score after one week” says Sarah. Nevertheless, she was hooked and soon enrolled in the Networking Academy at the University of Montana at Missoula. Two years later, Sarah took the exam again, passed, and earned her CCNA certification.

Sarah credits her successful experience in the Networking Academy to her instructors, the text books, the online curriculum, and the hands-on lab experience. “They were all important factors” says Sarah. The labs enabled her to practice router and switch configurations and the books were so valuable that she would often get up at 4a.m. to read and study.

Sometimes getting to class in Frenchtown, which is located in the rugged Montana countryside, could be challenging. The eight miles of unmaintained dirt road could be icy or impassable due to snow or fallen trees. Sarah put her experiences living in Greenland and the Antarctic to good use and ensured she arrived for classes on time.

When she was enrolled at the Networking Academy, Sarah was living in a small solar-powered cabin, without running water, that she built herself. She was also running her 160-acre farm and working as an independent technology contractor providing local area network support to small local businesses.

Sarah insists that her academy instructors, Penny Jakes and Rhonda Tabish, kept her focused. “Penny is a very good teacher,” says Sarah “she kept in touch with each person to see what they were going through. Penny must have seen something in me and knew I could do better.”

It must have been apparent to her instructors that Sarah was capable of some pretty extraordinary things. When she was enrolled at the Networking Academy, Sarah was living in a small solar-powered cabin, without running water, that she built herself. She was also running her 160-acre farm and working as an independent technology contractor providing local area network support to small local businesses. She did all this after beating kidney cancer in 2003. Clearly, Sarah’s positive attitude, dedication, and strong work ethic were factors in her success.



Now that she’s earned her CCNA certification, Sarah is searching for her dream job as a networking professional and is eager to work as part of an information technology team. “The Networking Academy has provided a very strong background” asserts Sarah. During interviews, Sarah is pleased to be able say that she has actually used the equipment in a lab environment instead of just having simulator experience. Her future plans include becoming a network engineer with Cisco Certified Network Professional (CCNP®) credentials, potentially specializing in VoIP.

When asked what she enjoyed most about the Networking Academy, Sarah replies “the challenge...it was definitely the longest time I ever studied and focused on earning a certification. Passing the CCNA exam was the reward for the hard work.”

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Her advice to others who are interested in the Networking Academy is “stay dedicated to it and don’t stray.” In addition, she suggests “learn the material, don’t just memorize it. Don’t get discouraged ... keep at it, and practice, practice, practice.”

For more information on the Networking Academy at the University of Montana, visit: www.mso.umt.edu



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