

Geointeresting Podcast Transcript

Episode 6: Sue Shumate, NGA's Talent Acquisition Lead

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Welcome to Geointeresting, presented by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. Today on the podcast we have Sue Shumate, NGA's talent acquisition lead. Sue's here to help demystify some of the intelligence community recruiting process and tell you a little bit more about some of the jobs we're currently hiring for.

NGA: Sue, thanks for being here on the Geointeresting podcast today. This fall, NGA has some pretty cool hiring initiatives going on, and we wanted you to come in here today and just kind of talk about them for our audience and for our potential applicants. So first up, we've got intern recruiting season. Can you tell me a little bit about what NGA is looking for in [its] potential interns?

SUE: Absolutely, and it's just a pleasure to be able to talk to you about these recruiting initiatives that we're undertaking. So our student intern program — to start off with, to let you know, we are opening the application period through October 10, and individuals who might be interested can check out our website at www.nga.mil. And what they'll find [is what] we are looking for in students that we are going to be selecting for our internship program in 2016. We are looking for individuals that are U.S. citizens, who are 18 years of age or older, enrolled in an undergraduate degree program and maintain an overall GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale, and finally, can commit to a 10-week period of time during the summer when they can work for NGA in the capacity of an internship. So then the question becomes, what are we looking for, what kinds of people, and what kinds of skills? NGA is a very broad organization, and we not only have skills that relate to the mission, we also have a whole host of skills and competencies we look for in students who might be able to bring specialties in anywhere from human development to contracting and finance office, as well as those skill sets that are in the GEOINT [geospatial intelligence] world, which would be more imagery analysts, intelligence analysts, all of our scientific work roles, and all the way through even in some of our securities kinds of work roles. So we're looking for a variety of individuals to come in but with a specific area in the technical, in the GEOINT or a geospatial area, as well as more of those support areas will be the three kind of flavors we're looking for.

NGA: Basically, you're saying NGA takes all kinds. I could be a music major [or] an English major, and there might be a really interesting role for me at the agency.

SUE: That's correct. If what we look for in addition to some of this — the technical expertise, with that and beyond that — for entry-level hires, we really are interested in people who have great critical-thinking skills; those individuals who have the ability to communicate well do really conduct the research that we need our organization to do, and you find those skill sets in a variety of majors. History majors are really good at looking back at the past and trying to analyze what that history means in the context of who is communicating it. Those are the same types of things that we might be doing in some of our work roles where we're trying to understand context, and we're trying to identify individuals who can use their critical-thinking skills to be able to understand, in an unbiased way, the information that they're researching.



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NGA: So if I'm an intern and I submit my application by the October 10 deadline, what should I expect next?

SUE: Next step would be in inside of NGA. We will have our hiring managers start looking at the applicants to determine who we are going to interview, if we decide to do an interview, or who we're going to decide to select this year. We're not requiring interviews, but some of our hiring managers may choose to do an interview in that process. We will [do this] by the end of the year, so closing October 10, by the end of the year, our expectation will be that our hiring managers will have had the opportunity to look at all of the applicants and then to make some decision on who they want to extend offers to. So in terms of your question, what could they expect? They would submit the application, and then there would be a period of time they would have contact from a hiring manager or from our student programs team who would be contacting them to extend an offer to them based on what they submitted. But our goal is to have this all wrapped up by the end of the year because the students will have to then undertake the security clearance process, and so that would be the next step that the student would have, with the ultimate goal of submitting the offer to the student, having them go through the process, and then by May to June of fiscal year 16, we would have those individuals coming on board to work that 10-week period with us.

NGA: And I think the most important question — these are paid internships, right?

SUE: Absolutely! They are paid internships. That was very exciting. Individuals who are selected for our opportunities not only get paid, as I mentioned earlier, they are put through the security clearance process, so they will have that level of security when they come to work for us, and they can expect meaningful work. This does not work for an intern to come in and do administrative support type of work; not that that would be a problem to learn that in our agency, but we really want them to do work that's meaningful in the area they're chosen to do. For example, if they're selected to work in one of our mission-critical areas, they will be actually doing work that is related to that work role that they're hired into. If they're hired as a human development specialist, they may be working on my team, or they may be working in our policy. There's a variety of places that we could place them. So it's relevant experience, added on top of the beauty of being able to go through the security clearance process and have achieved that clearance, as well as then getting paid to do the work.

NGA: So, pivoting just a little bit from interns, the agency is also undergoing, right now, a pretty big hiring push around some interesting work roles that maybe people don't necessarily associate with geospatial intelligence. Can you talk a little bit about those work roles and what the agency is looking for, for some career options?

SUE: Definitely. What we're looking for — we have several things that I can provide you. The first is we're having a hiring event on November 4, and that event is only open to individuals who've been selected for an interview. So people who have gone out to our website and made an application will be screened at the end of September through early October, and we will be making some decisions about the individuals that will be selected to come in for an interview here in our building in Springfield, Virginia, in October. Those types of work roles we're specifically looking for at that event are IAs and GAs, the imagery and geospatial analyst. Those positions are part of the core of NGA, what we do as an agency. But second to that, we're also looking for folks with some cyber experience, as in our technology area, and we're looking for

systems engineers. Now those are exclusive for the event, but we also have a variety of other openings that are out there right now. We're looking for police officers; we're looking for attorneys; we're looking for accountants [and] finance people; we're looking for individuals who have contracts background; and we're looking for aero analysts, maritime analysts [and] geodetic surveyors. So you can see the list of what we're looking for is pretty vast and pretty large. We have really great information on our website about those occupations that people can tap into so that they can learn more about the occupation, and they can learn more about what we would expect when we hire somebody in those areas.

NGA: So again, I'm looking for a job; I see something that I really like on NGA's career site, and I apply for it. What happens next in that process? How does it differ from the internship process?

SUE: So on the website, when an applicant goes there, they will see two different things that are really important: They'll see an announcement that has an AON code next to it, and they'll see an announcement has an open and continuous statement.

NGA: What is an AON?

SUE: So an AON is an Announcement Opportunity Notice versus the opening and continuous. And so an Announcement Opportunity Notice, or the AON, is open only for a two-week cycle. We do post all of our announcements every Monday, so we always encourage applicants — if you don't see something today, come back next week. We don't have an RSS feed to drive the information to the applicant, so we encourage applicants to come back every Monday and check what we have on our website. The AONs close on a two-week cycle, and then those applicants will be reviewed by our team of recruiters to determine those individuals who have met the mandatory qualifications and part of the desirable qualifications we have in the announcement. Then they're sent forward to a hiring manager. The difference between the AON and the open and continuous is that in the open and continuous, we're looking for applicants, maybe in the near future or maybe over the course of several months, to come. So we're trying to put those openings out so that when we're visiting colleges and universities and professional organizations, we can speak to the openings that we expect to have in the near future, and applicants can start applying now. So the differences, as I've stated, is an AON closes in two weeks [and] an open and continuous will be longer, and we may have a longer point in time before we're ready to make a hire for that work role.

NGA: Now does every resume that gets submitted against a job opening get reviewed by a person at NGA?

SUE: Absolutely. When we have applicants who apply and my team starts making the review, we will go through all of the applications and look at them individually. And what we were specifically looking for is number one, did the applicant — were they able to ensure they've met all the mandatory qualifications? And sometimes we look also for the desirable qualifications. Our focus is very much on whether or not that applicant is able to demonstrate in their resume and cover letter that they've met those requirements, and so that's what those individuals who are looking at each one of those applications will be looking for. When they leave my team, once my team has made an assessment to determine if the person has met those mandatory qualifications, then they would be forwarded to hiring panel where the subject matter experts are

going to look in more depth for who they want to interview. Now sort of a segue into a discussion about the mandatory qualifications. What I always tell applicants is you can't have four out of the five or four out of the six if there are six mandatory; you have to have all of them, and they have to be very concrete. We have to be able to see them in the resume or the cover letter. And we don't infer that they're there just because you might have worked in a similar job. We have to actually see they're written in; that you've met those. So that's a very important key to an applicant to be able to demonstrate they have those skills.

NGA: Talk to me a little bit about the cover letter. How important is that in your decision-making process?

SUE: I believe very strongly in the cover letter. It's my belief that a cover letter's like this beautiful white space. It's almost like a painter just leaving the blank canvas. An applicant who has this opportunity to demonstrate how they are the best-qualified applicant for the job and ignores the cover letter is ignoring this beautiful opportunity they have to let the recruiter and the hiring manager know why they're the best qualified for the job. So it's not mandatory; people can choose not to do it, but I strongly believe that by using that space to create your story and explain why you're applying to NGA, how you've met the mandatory qualifications, and then to really be able to speak to what you want to contribute to our organization — that's also key.

NGA: So some of these positions that are out there now — they are more junior positions, and you're kind of looking for some of those recent college graduates. When should those people be applying to jobs? I'm a senior in college. I'm considering a career at NGA [and] I see a position that's open. When should I be applying and submitting my resume to get through the clearance process?

SUE: That's a really good question, and the reason I say it's a really good question [is] because it's a piece that many times our applicants missed. Many times we see college students who have just graduated are now looking for jobs, and as we've just described, part of our hiring process for the student intern is equal to the hiring process for anyone coming into a job. There is a process to go through. The top-secret security clearance process can take anywhere from five to six months or longer to come through that process. So we highly encourage those first-semester seniors or those seniors who will be graduating this fall to start the application process now. It's just a perfect time to apply for jobs because by the time you are interviewed and you're offered the job, you complete your paperwork, and then go through the security process itself, it's going to be time for graduation. It's going to be time for you to come onboard. A second piece to that question is about the internships, also overarching when is the best time for college students to apply. Our internship is open for undergraduate, graduate [and], Ph.D. students. We always encourage them to apply early because generally, at the undergraduate level, the best time is the freshman or sophomore [year] in college to start that application process because that individual has to be in school after their internship. They have to have at least one semester beyond the internship that they're going to be in school, and the same holds true for those people applying for our jobs. Many times, as I said earlier, by the time we get an applicant to apply, they've already graduated. They are needing jobs today, and they don't have the luxury of time to wait. So to make the stars and the moon [and] everything align, we really recommend for college students it's a really good time to start when they're in their senior year.

NGA: What's the key takeaway that you want someone applying to NGA to take from this podcast? What kind of people are we looking for here?

SUE: I think we are looking for a breath of skills and experience and what the key takeaway — two key takeaways [are] if I might: One would be even if you don't think that your skills aligned to NGA, take a look at our jobs and look at the description of our jobs. You might be surprised at what opportunities might be available you not might not have thought of. That would be the first, and the second [is] when you do get ready to apply, make sure you apply early. Don't wait until the last minute, and make sure you meet the mandatory qualifications; make sure they're clear in the application or cover letter.

NGA: Sue, thank you so much for joining us today. I think that a lot of people interested in a career at NGA might have some additional questions after listening to this podcast. Would you be interested in coming back at a later date and maybe answering some of those questions for us?

SUE: Absolutely. I think it's a really great idea, and I'm more than happy to come back and answer questions that we haven't covered today that would help applicants to successfully apply for our jobs. Absolutely. I'd be happy to.

NGA: If you have a recruiting question that Sue didn't cover today, please feel free to send it to us via Twitter at [NGA_GEOINT](#) or email it to us at publicaffairs@nga.mil. For more information about NGA careers, please visit www.nga.mil/careers.

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