Checking in with CenUSA

Wondering about that Greenlee College internship requirement? Learn how Communications Intern Ali Lenger made it work.

What is your major, why did you apply for an internship initially? What did you want to get out of it?

I am a public relations major with a sociology minor. I found out about CenUSA Bioenergy at the Jump-Start Career Fair in the spring of 2015. My professor, Jay Newell, encouraged me to pursue this internship and introduced me to Anne Kinzel, CenUSA’s Chief Operating Officer at her booth.

This was my first journalistic internship. My goals were to improve my professional web writing skills and social media tactics. I have also been able to work on design and other skills as well.

How long was your internship?

My CenUSA Bioenergy internship was one full year.

What are 2 or 3 things you’ve learned from your experience?

I learned a lot about switchgrass and the biofuel process. There are many environmental benefits to switchgrass and other perennials that I did not know about before. I have met so many intelligent, passionate people at CenUSA who want to make this knowledge accessible to the world and help switchgrass find a place on the market. I am glad I was able to write about all the hard work CenUSA is doing.

In relation to my education, learning how to correctly target an audience is a key part of public relations, journalism, and advertising. I learned to adapt CenUSA’s message to defined audience groups across many forms of media including our newsletter, Facebook, YouTube, and others.

What would you say to a younger student heading into their first journalism internship?

AP Style is your friend. Review your writing, practice the parts of AP Style that you struggle with, and review it again. I would also advise to set up goals that to complete on a daily, weekly, and or monthly basis. Keeping a schedule, and sticking to deadlines is essential.

What was the best and worst thing about being an intern?

The best part about being an intern is the feedback that I have received. Writing for the web is far different than the writing I have done in the past. My writing has improved because of my supervisors’ constructive feedback.

The worst part about being an intern is working on your time management, but this is an important part of the process. I learned how to schedule myself and juggle multiple tasks at once.
Do you think it will help you professionally? If so, how?

This internship has helped me develop my professional profile in the following areas:

- **Communication.** Maintaining strong communication between my coworker and supervisors has been very important to my internship. They have maintained a receptive and open-minded environment where new ideas are welcomed. I have learned that being a team player, getting your job done, and listening to others allows your voice and others to be heard.

- **Writing Skills.** It can be hard the first time that you receive feedback on your writing, but it is only there to help you improve. As I mentioned before, my writing skills have greatly improved thanks to their revisions. Don’t be afraid to ask for help!

- **Time Management.** This internship has been great preparation to what a real work environment will be like. It is important to plan your work in advance just in case unexpected mishaps occur like a rescheduled interview or an update to your story.

- **Building Professional Relationships.** Establishing strong communication with my supervisors has been very important. They are helpful and have given me great guidance. Networking can help you discover opportunities and challenge yourself to try new things. My supervisors have been very supportive of my journey this past year, and given me advice that I will treasure for years to come.

**When do you plan to graduate? What is next for you? Job/grad school...?**

I plan to graduate in May of 2017. After I graduate, I plan on moving to Seattle to work in Public Relations. I am very thankful to all at CenUSA, especially to Anne Kinzel, Pam Porter, Jill Euken, Amy Kohmetscher, and Jake Miller. Thank you for an amazing experience, and I wish you all the best of luck in your endeavors!

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