Checking in with CenUSA

Get the low-down on the college internship experience with CenUSA Bioenergy Communications Intern Jake Miller

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

I’m a journalism major with a sociology minor. My junior year at Iowa State I was taking a journalism class that assigned everyone a beat to follow, mine was environment. While working on a story for that class I met and interviewed Anne Kinzel who told me that CenUSA offers communication internships, so when I saw the CenUSA booth at the career fair I decided to apply. I was initially hoping to get a few bylines and portfolio pieces. In addition to producing work I was excited to learn about the different directions my degree could potentially take me.

How long was your internship?

I worked with CenUSA for one year.

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

I think one of the biggest things I learned was how to write about technical topics in general terms. I also learned how to tailor interview questions to get responses that were in terms I could understand. I had very little bioenergy knowledge going into this position and definitely learned a ton about it in the last year. Lastly, going off of my answer to the last question, I learned that I could probably get a job in public relations.

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

If you aren’t familiar with the content your internship will have you writing about learn as much about it as you can. Also, bringing recorders to interviews helps a ton, especially if you’re interviewing someone about a topic you aren’t familiar with.

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

I have very few complaints about being a CenUSA intern, so the worst part was probably just having to balance work and class. My favorite part was probably working on BLADES. We had a great communications team to work with, which made the whole process of producing BLADES more enjoyable, and it allowed me plenty of opportunity to get my byline published. In addition to BLADES, I liked doing the side projects that came up from time to time; updating the website’s home page, creating a harvest month plan for social media, and creating my Social Media presentation for the annual meeting were all good ways for me to try something different and break up the work week.
Do you think it will help you professionally? If so, how?

I’m sure my experience at CenUSA will help me professionally in more ways than I could list here. There are some big examples like learning how to work on deadline, being a more effective interviewer, and learning to work in a team to create content. There are also some smaller, less obvious examples. This was my first professional experience, so before this summer I had never gone on a business trip of any kind. I feel like going to the annual meeting in Wisconsin gave me a look at how those kind of trips are done and what to expect on future trips.

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

I graduate in December of 2016. Right now my plan for life after college is to look for a job doing something similar to what I did at CenUSA. Over the past year I’ve discovered that I enjoy public relations and communications type work and would like to continue working in that field.

Check out Jake’s articles in our BLADES newsletter.

- Think Safety First
- Genera – IBBS Partnership: Developing Proper Biomass Storage Methods
- Healthy Soil, Healthy Plants
- Cultivating Higher Yielding Scientists
- Planting Perennial Grasses In the Midwest to Reduce Water Pollution
- Switchgrass: Two Decades of Progress
- Ken Vogel – Leading Progress on Switchgrass
- To Grow or Not to Grow: New Switchgrass Decision Tool

Jake’s primary beat was writing for our BLADES’ newsletter.