2010

November 2010 Newsletter

Career Center, Illinois Wesleyan University

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/ccenter_newsletter/13
How did you find out about your internship?
I heard about this job from my father, who also works for the Smithsonian. He forwarded me an email to which I responded with a transcript and a resume. Needless to say, I got the job.

What did you do there?
I was a Gallery Attendant. I worked in collaboration with the OPS (Office of Protection Services) and had to attend formation every morning. Formation is the daily meeting where the sergeants assign the posts and relay any special instructions for the day. Throughout the course of a day I would patrol my area, answer questions, and make sure that everything was okay. In the Wright Brothers exhibit, people would usually ask me if the plane was real, to which I would answer “Yes.” Then they would get an excited look on their faces and take lots of pictures. The most unruly visitors were the middle school girls. They would walk around in packs and try to sneak drinks into the restaurant, which is attached.

What did you learn through your experience?
I learned a lot about the principles of flight and a lot about planets. I also noticed many things about people in general. I came to expect certain behavior from certain groups of people. For instance, international visitors would move very quickly through the museum, taking lots of pictures because they were probably on a tour of the entire city and only had one day to see everything.

Did it help you at all with your future plans?
This really gave me experience in supervising large groups of people in which I was responsible for all of them. I remember specifically this one time where I had to talk with a dad who was angry that I had told his son to stop climbing on the exhibits. So through times like that, I learned how to handle frustrating situations with complete strangers I was in charge of.

What was your favorite part about working at the Smithsonian?
My favorite part about working at the Smithsonian was the people. My coworkers were some of the most interesting people I have ever experienced. My fellow Gallery Attendants and I ruled the second floor and had hilarious conversations with the IMAX employees and the education program people. Also, it is a great experience to see 10,000 people a day come through the doors and to be responsible for every one of them.

Who would you recommend this internship to?
I would recommend this job to anybody who has family in the D.C. area and is interested in museums. My dad lives near D.C. so I was living for free. Also, for this job, you need a very comfortable pair of shoes, as you will be on your feet all day.

INTERN PROFILE
Max Briggs ‘12
Major: Music Performance - Tuba
Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C.)
For most of my life, I have been a shameless band geek. I started playing saxophone when I was 11, and to this day, you can see me in the stands at a football or basketball game with my trusty Ramses (that’s my saxophone’s name… yes, I named it) around my neck as I yell at the opposing team. Every two to three days, I reminisce with a wistful look in my eyes about being a drum major in one of the most disorganized marching bands to ever grace the fields of Illinois football stadiums. Every two to three minutes, I make terrible band-related jokes to those who aren’t in music at all. Did you honestly expect any less of me?

But despite my love for music, I went on to pursue a degree in political science. Nay, I was neither brave nor bold enough to pursue a degree that few have the courage to face. To my music major friends, I salute you. May this article help you realize that a life in a cardboard box does not await you.

As I hinted at, many music students look at their degree with the mentality that finding a job will be difficult, if not impossible, after they graduate. With the economic recession not quite on the turn yet, it is easy to understand this apprehension. However, after speaking with Angela Beeching, the Career Services director of the New England Conservatory, any music major’s fears can easily be put to rest.

According to Beeching, there are many skills any employer wants out of their employees that music students easily adopt through their day-to-day music training, including interpersonal skills, self-discipline, problem-solving skills, leadership, and analytical thinking. “If you think more broadly about what being ‘a musician’ means, you’ll find the right niches for your career,” she said. “It’s not always just playing an instrument or teaching. But if you have this superstar fixation where you want to be a famous soloist or concert violinist, then you’re in for the long haul.”

Director of IWU’s School of Music, Dr. Mario Pelusi also echoed that notion. “[Many music majors] see how competitive the field is, but they’re looking at very famous people who have public notoriety and not seeing all the countless other musicians who are making a living, even though they don’t have that fame,” he said. “Our goal is to focus on the education that music majors will need in order to be successful—to whatever level they aspire.”

So if music majors don’t have their names up in lights, then what are they doing? Beeching illustrated the process every music major faces after they graduate. “Most performance majors do a range of things, and that’s all part of the process in finding their niche,” she said. “They start going to various auditions, teaching lessons in their own studio, and focusing on their own entrepreneurial projects, such as starting their own ensemble or instrument repair shop. It’s very normal for musicians to have this kind of multi-strand career. Eventually, one opportunity leads to another or you figure out what projects or type of work you are best suited for and challenged by, and you go in that direction.”

As for music students specifically from IWU, Dr. Pelusi was very proud of the success they tend to find. “For our music education students, we have a record of 100 percent job placement after IWU,” he said. “That’s really impressive, given the current economy. So if our music education majors do well and persevere, they will find jobs. Most of our performance majors go on to graduate school. It’s very difficult for them to compete with everyone else otherwise. Our composition majors also usually go on to graduate schools. Many of them become film composers or professors, once they get their doctorate. Without a doctoral degree, it is not possible to...
A Career in Helping Students Achieve Their Dreams

Working in the Career Center is pretty fantastic, if I do say so myself. Not only do I get an opportunity to let all of IWU know random, ridiculous facts about myself and to assert how much of a nerd I am, every single day, but I get to work with some really cool people. Every day, I ask myself how one can attain the awesomeness my supervisors exhibit. Is it truly possible to become that amazing while helping college students get their lives on track? After searching far and wide, I spoke with a few alumni who gave me the answers I desired. Maybe you, too, will pursue a career in higher education administration and reach the level of awesome my supervisors have attained. (Warren, can I have tomorrow off, now? No? Okay…) After graduating from IWU in 2001, Josh Butts used his previous experience in public relations to land a fundraising job with the University of Chicago. This job proved to be just the thing to jump-start a career that would take him across the U.S.

“U of C was hiring fundraisers for their $2 billion campaign, and they were looking for people with marketing or public relations experience,” Butts said. “So certain how to prepare for the ambiguous, much-referred to “real world.” To answer that question, both Beeching and Pelusi emphasized one thing above all else: experience.

Pelusi said, “Look for internships, start networking with professionals, enter competitions, and start refining audition skills. Even when you’re successful, you’re auditioning continually. If you’re a music education major, get as much teaching experience as you can. Also, start using social media for promotional purposes. Learn how to market yourself.”

Beeching said, “[Music majors] need to visit the Career Center and connect with alums who can help them figure out what they want to do from here. The second thing they can do is invest time each week in researching their future career. You can make a to-do list of things like setting up an informational interview with someone to talk about career plans. People who have the hardest time making this transition are those who haven’t done any internships or student teaching or gigs before graduating.”

But even with all the to-do lists and experience, Beeching talked about the one thing music majors need to know before they make music a career.

“They need to know that they really love music,” she said. “I also think it’s important that they have a sense of themselves. How do they want to connect music with other people? Is there a market for their music? I think performers often become so concerned with how well they’re playing that they forget about the audience. It becomes more of a competition than anything. They need to ask themselves if this is about them or if it’s about sharing their music with others. How do they want to contribute? There is a need for music out there, and they need to think about the practical side of how they might meet these needs before they start their careers.”

Information courtesy of Angela Beeching
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a lot of different ways you can move with this career.”

The possibilities with higher education administration are almost limitless. Where there is a job to be done, someone needs to be there to do it.

“There is a lot you can do,” Butts said. “Some people go into human resources, but if you’re more business-minded, you can always work in the Dean of Administration’s office, managing finances, or

in admissions. If you really think about it, it’s kind of like a small city. There are plenty of jobs to be done.”

For George, there were opportunities for him to connect with the school outside of his daily tasks in the office.

“I loved how, even as a professional, I could get involved in the campus and student life,” he said. “This also allowed me to better understand the institution I represented. I was able to perform with the Denison Jazz Ensemble and meet many fine students and faculty in the music department. I was very fortunate to be able to use my own music background from IWU.”

Many graduate schools are offering degrees for students who do not want their contribution to a college community to stop after classes end. If this sounds like the career path for you, one of our staff members would be happy to talk with you about where to go after graduation.

What to Know Before You Go to Law School

One of my favorite shows was The Practice. You may know its not-as-good spin-off, Boston Legal. (Fight me on that. I dare you.) Before The Practice went off the air, I would watch it every week with my family. I was so drawn into the dramatic cases, the quick-thinking lawyers, and the clever quips my favorite character, Alan would make to his co-workers who dared question his unorthodox ways. But soon after I decided that I would be making six figures as a lawyer some day, I realized that there was more to being a lawyer than what I had thought. While it is undoubtedly a fantastic job, the glamour most people come to expect after watching hours of Boston Legal is not always there right away.

I had the opportunity to talk to two IWU alumni who shed further light on the realities of law school. Anna Konradi, who graduated from IWU in 2009, is currently a law student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. For her, the uncertain economic climate is one of those realities.

"Firms’ cost-conscious clients are now hesitant to pay for law student and new associate work, and in response, firms have cut their summer programs and first-year hiring dramatically," she said. “I think it’s important for students to temper their expectations about high-paying post-graduate employment. In some respects, this may be a good thing. People who really want to study and practice law will continue coming to law school.”

Chris Seps, a 2007 graduate from IWU, has already stepped out into the post-graduate world as a lawyer for Locke Lord Bissell and Liddell in Chicago. From his first-hand experience, he was able to illustrate what that world looks like.

“Most law students start at jobs earning less than $75,000 a year but still working over 60 hours a week with six figures worth of student loans to pay off,” he said. “It’s harsh, but it’s reality. Only the lucky 30 percent of graduates start earning over $100,000 right out of school, and each year of law school costs an average of $30,000, even at public schools.”

As Seps echoed, many students are becoming increasingly hesitant to go to graduate school because of student loans.

“Debt is a real concern for most law students, and the decision to take out government loans should not be made lightly,” Konradi said. “The adage goes, ‘Live like a lawyer when you’re a student, and you could end up living like a student when you’re a lawyer.’ Because I came straight through, my standard of living in grad school is similar to the one I had during college.”

“I attended the highest ranked school that accepted me and worked my tail off so that I landed a job at a big firm paying big bucks,” Seps said. “I could have attended a lower ranked law school that offered me a scholarship, but law firms only look at two things when hiring: the rank of the school and your grades. Go to the best school you can and work hard, and you’ll set yourself up for a job that will allow you to pay off your loans in two or three years.”

There also exists the issue of going to law school right after graduation or waiting for a couple of years.

Konradi said, “You should not come straight through if you’re not absolutely positive that you want to be an attorney or prepared to jump into a very challenging academic environment right after graduation. Some [students] spend a year working as a clerk in a law office to find out if being a lawyer is something that they want to do. That being said, students who are still in school tend to do better on their LSATs than those who have been out for a few years.”

Seps said, “The best time to go to law school is two or three years after college. Going to law school requires a huge commitment of time and money. Waiting for a few years gives you a chance to gain some experience that will be invaluable when studying and practicing law.”

If you’re still on the fence about whether to make that giant leap into law school, both of our alums had wise words to consider before you make that decision.

“Do some serious research before making the decision to attend law school,” Konradi said. “There’s a lot more to the practice of law than the high profile constitutional law cases. Use the Career Center to set up an internship with a local law firm and talk to current law students and attorneys about their experiences. Also, be realistic when you choose a law school. Some schools provide students with access to specific public-sector markets, whereas others have more national reaches for positions in large private firms. That doesn’t mean that some schools are ‘bad,’ but it does necessitate that students do their research before signing up for a program that won’t ultimately be able to place them in the kind of job they had hoped for.”

“Law school is a gamble,” Seps said. “If you attend a top-50 law school and work your way into the top 30 percent of the class, you’ll be well-positioned to get a nicely-paying job. For everyone else, you will struggle to find a job, and when you do, you won’t be making any more money than your non-law school friends. If you’re doing it because you think you have no other options with your political science degree or you’re using it as a way to springboard yourself into a six-figure salary, you are going to be disappointed.”