FOCUS ON INTERNSHIPS

Four students, four internships, four very different experiences

Internships provide hands-on educational experiences distinct from learning in a classroom, which is why Individualized Majors (IMJRs) are encouraged to intern at least once during their undergraduate careers. Anyone can find an internship that coincides with her/his individualized major. Whether you choose to intern during the spring or fall semesters or during a school break, your options are endless. You can intern abroad, at school, or close to your hometown. You can research, work outside, teach, organize communities, or anything else you find. Regardless of what you’re looking for, an internship will nurture and engage you so long as you take full advantage of the opportunity.

In this newsletter, we have highlighted four students and the internships they have done. They have traveled the world working with a variety of people in a setting that catered to their individual needs. None of them had the same experience; each however, made the most out of this opportunity UConn and IMJR offers them, and you can, too! We hope this newsletter provides the information and stories you need as you decide whether or not an internship is right for you.

Brenna Regan, IISP Peer Advisor and Environmental Justice IMJR

Andrew Flynn
IMJR in Environmental Economics, Intern at 350.org

Why and how did you choose your internship?
I had one major criteria in mind while searching for an internship. I wanted to work for a group that promoted renewable energy solutions. While I didn't really have too much of an interest in getting into policy work out of college, I really wanted to get a solid perspective on how the renewable energy industry was taking shape.

Starting out, I had a couple different groups in mind, the Sierra Club and PIRG, some big names in the environmental movement, but I ended up finding exactly what I was looking for. Established in 2007, 350.org is a global organization devoted to solving the climate crisis with operations in over 188 countries, but you would never guess that based on the size of its staff. With a core paid staff of around thirty people, 350.org plans online campaigns, promotes grassroots organizing, and initiates mass public actions aimed at addressing climate change. It recently held “Moving Planet: A Day to Move Beyond Fossil Fuels,” its third international day of action.  

(Continued on p. 2)
I learned more than I could imagine about the problems that people around the world face and how solutions are being set into motion.

Andrew Flynn

Please explain what your internship was and the responsibilities you were given.

I worked on a couple of different projects in Washington D.C. this summer, but much of my day-to-day focus was working on Moving Planet. What makes 350.org so unique is also what makes it so successful and so powerful; while the actual staff of 350.org may be small, it has thousands of contacts around the globe, from huge multinational environmental organizations to artists in undeveloped nations, and when called upon they can mobilize huge and iconic movements in places where it really counts. Here in the United States any kind of policy change can be very hard to accomplish, but a bike rally encompassing thousands in the Dominican Republic can bring bike lanes to the entire country and protests in Taiwan can be the push that brings the government to switch from expensive imported fossil fuels to wind and tidal energy. That's not to say that we didn't work to change US policy though.

I worked with 350.org's US Political Director and Communications Coordinator in Boston to start a drive against Senator Scott Brown who fought to repeal the Clean Air Act after accepting nearly two million dollars in campaign funding from polluters. My biggest task this summer, however, was trying to spark events in places where none had been registered. This meant researching environmental and socioeconomic issues in Mongolia and Puerto Rico, reaching out to student groups and environmental law firms in South Korea and Taiwan, and helping cycling teams and local activists connect with their communities and get people moving.

Did you achieve the experience you hoped for through this internship? Why or why not?

It was an incredible experience and I learned more than I could imagine about the problems that people around the world face and how the solutions are there and being set into motion. I also saw how policy could help or hinder these efforts, how passion or corruption could spark a nation or grind it to a halt. It was particularly amazing to see what was going on in our own country, what politics and the economy was doing to slow the renewable energy industry and how the climate change denial movement had taken hold both in the media and of the people.

How will the internship influence the rest of your undergraduate career and future?

After being around such impassioned individuals, and the entire political scene in Washington, I took away a strong interest in national and international politics, a desire to do something positive with my life and the knowledge that anybody with an idea has the ability to change the world. When I graduate I want to get into either the renewable energy or electric car industry, two industries that I think to be the biggest growing sectors over the next few decades. I will continue to have a voice and reach out to people because, whether you believe it now or not, climate change is happening. It is one of the biggest issues we will ever face and it is one that we must all face together.

Brenna Regan

IMJR in Environmental Justice,
Intern for South African Education & Environment Project

Where and what was your internship?

I always wanted to spend a semester abroad in Africa, and the social justice theme of the UConn Honors in Cape Town exchange was right up my alley, so it was any easy choice. The fact that the program is internship-based made going to South Africa even more exciting for me. I knew I wanted my internship to involve my Environmental Justice IMJR, and, I wanted to work within a community. I told our program coordinator what I hoped for in an internship and he provided me with ex-

(Continued on p. 3)
me with exactly that! I ended up getting an internship with the South African Education and Environment Project (SAEP), and my life hasn’t been the same since.

SAEP is a non-profit organization that works in a township (townships are huge residential areas of extreme poverty) called Philippi, providing resources based on the needs and requests of community members. SAEP works mostly on education, coordinating mentoring programs for students of all ages. I was fortunate enough to organize an after-school environmental program for high school aged students. We did creative activities to get them thinking about local and global environmental issues. Among the activities we did were plays, debates and action-planning, and walks around their community – every day that we went into the schools I was inspired by the innovations and knowledge of the students. SAEP integrates environmental consciousness into its work, so we also got to take the students on hikes up some of the most beautiful mountains in the world. I gained so much understanding and experience through being with the students both inside and outside of the classroom, which is why I changed and continue to change so much from my time spent with them.

What were the biggest challenges of your internship?

One challenge for us was the schools being extremely underfunded and under-resourced, so lesson planning was made difficult. What was most challenging, however, was seeing what they had and knowing what I had. There were massive amounts of books, art supplies, and other materials readily available to me while in school; in Philippi, the only constant school supplies they have are vandalized desks and chairs to sit in. Reality hit us when our students showed us around their neighborhoods; there we were, talking to them about the environment, when there was not one tree in the area in which they lived and some of them lived right next to a pond of overflowing sewage and garbage. Another challenge was the limited communication we had with students. Their academic language is English, however, speaking abilities of the students varies dramatically. Many of the students spoke Xhosa fluently, but I only knew the basics of this language. Inevitably, it was very difficult for us to understand each other. Even when the students did understand the English, many hesitated to use English in class because they were not confident in their speaking abilities. These were two among the many challenges I dealt with throughout the entirety of my internship, all of which strengthened my understanding of humanity.

How has the internship experience changed you?

To put it most simply, my internship experience has provoked me to become more passionate and appreciative of my undergraduate experience, but a bit more cynical, too. I look around at the University of Connecticut, and see all that we have at our disposal and I get angry when I think that everyone here may not be taking advantage of, or recognize, all that we have. I am more motivated to be genuine in everything that I do, and really work to bring the diverse community we have at UConn together, because human connections are really what aid in making this world a more fair and equal place.

Corey Dwyer

IMJR in Health, Environment, and Society, Intern for Elder Horizons at Yale-New Haven Hospital

How did you choose the internship that you did?

During the summer after my freshman year, I applied to be a volunteer at Yale-New Haven Hospital. During my interview, I was introduced to the program Elder Horizons. It is a program which sees patients seventy years of age and older with the main goal of trying to prevent dementia. I performed social, cognitive, and physical interventions that were designed to help the patient during...
What and where was your internship?

I interned in Cape Town at Christel House South Africa. CHSA is a K-12 school built specifically to fully prepare children from some of the poorest communities around Cape Town for higher education, further certification, and the national job market. After talking with my program coordinators about my interests in education in the development sector, they felt CHSA would be a good fit. It definitely was!

What were your responsibilities?

While at CHSA I spent half of my time with the fourth grade and the other half with the twelfth. I assisted one of the fourth grade teachers, Ms Marilyn Groep, in executing her lesson plans and tutoring the “learners.” With the twelfth graders I actually ran my own lesson plan on Human Rights Literacy which took place over a few weeks.

This was of course an enriching experience for a student with my career goals. Learning from highly experienced educators in the Christel House setting taught me a great deal about culturally appropriate lesson-planning and curriculum design. I also learned about ways to overcome language barriers while still achieving educational goals and ways to assist students who face obstacles to their learning outside the classroom. Interning at CHSA has motivated me to keep pursuing my goals in education in the development sector and has driven me to work harder in related activities while still at UConn, especially with the UNESCO Student Ambassadors for Human Rights.

For more information on internships and workshops, visit career.uconn.edu