

## **My Summer Internship**

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Any new hire has the potential to make or break the dynamic of a shared office space. While working as an intern at the United States Consulate General in Montreal for four months, I saw how the work environment benefited from interns' hard work and creativity during their tenure at the consulate. I felt happy to be one of the chosen students to intern at the Consulate but, although I began to understand my role in the office and what supervisors expected, I could not imagine what the work dynamic between student interns would be like. If anything, I expected competitiveness between classmates that gets perpetuated in the university to have extended into the workplace.

This was not what I found at work. Instead, the interns worked well alongside each other and in cooperation, while sharing the benefits (i.e. information, professional connections, free food) of our positions. My responsibilities, which included event planning with local community leaders and public outreach according to diplomatic goals of the U.S. Government, were improved by intern camaraderie and beneficent oversight from consulate staff.

Even though the internship was advertised as being "voluntary", it was far from unpaid: the learning experience I got to be a part of and the networks I built while working at the Consulate for a couple months are priceless benefits. An internship with the U.S. Government's Mission in Canada, at any Consulate or the Embassy, is formative for university students because it teaches workplace confidence and brings them into contact with professionals in their industries of interest.

Soon after beginning my work-term I was feeling inspired: not only from the skilled Consulate staff that I got to communicate with every day, but also from fellow interns. The interns learned on the job and were able to support each other in building networks. This dynamic became an unexpected benefit of working the internship position: finding that I could build rapport with bright, young colleagues whose enthusiasm helped me along the way. Being in contact with motivated students has helped me to reevaluate my own career plan. Hearing about my fellow interns' life

experiences and professional goals has led me to feel more hopeful about possibilities for self-development.

Any of the new interns I shared an office space with would agree that within the first couple of days of getting to know each other, our shared office space became littered with reference points to moments of shared learning experiences and laughter. I've never had reason to use this phrase but we all got along fabulously. The friendships formed facilitated the planning for group activities, such as our trip to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), where we met with the U.S. Representative on the ICAO Council, Ambassador Duane Woerth. This event was one of those unadvertised benefits of being an intern at the Consulate: being able to hear enlightened ideas and lessons in diplomacy from experienced ambassadors.

We also planned outreach for public audiences as a group in the Public Affairs office. These included educational events with day camps focusing on the work of exceptional Americans. One of these events celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech at the March on Washington. We also planned local tours for U.S. State Department designated Speakers and Specialists to speak with students and academics. For State Department exchange program alumni we organized a conference on social media and business with one of Quebec's leading digital marketing experts.

The information I got from experienced professionals in diplomacy, public relations, security, business, and event management was invaluable to me, a beginner in all these fields. The devoted Consulate team treated interns as confident workers able to manage their own schedules and allowed us creativity in completing projects. For their part, I saw the interns show up for work and fulfill their assignments in a motivated fashion, treating everyone with real respect.

The consulate internship as a learning opportunity is amplified by one's own attitude toward learning as they work. How much you're going to learn as an intern is dependent on you: how you go about your job and the connections you form with others—Canadians and American staff as well as fellow interns. My experience was enhanced by the genuinely good people I got to work with; my ability to achieve professional goals in a team was strengthened. I won't be forgetting my colleagues or my days at the Consulate any time soon.