Internship Research Report

It is difficult to put into words just how large of an impact this internship has made on both my long-term career goals as well as my confidence in my professional skills. My summer with Heifer International has been a huge growing experience both personally and professionally. Heifer International is a non-profit organization dedicated to ending hunger and poverty across the globe while caring for the environment. We do this by donating “living gifts” of livestock to families in need and training them on how to create an income from these animals. A huge part of Heifer’s mission is “passing on the gift,” which is an agreement between Heifer and their project partners that they will pass on the first healthy female offspring to another family in that community. This commitment to passing on the gift is essential to creating a larger, sustainable impact on a community. Heifer Village, where I have worked this summer, is Heifer International’s education center. Our job is to educate the public on Heifer’s mission and what they can do to help.

My internship at Heifer Village has encompassed many different responsibilities. Because my internship has covered so many different aspects of working in a large, multi-department organization, I am more confident than ever that I have many things to offer in a professional setting. One of my largest responsibilities has been leading Discover Heifer programs. Discover Heifer is an hour-long program where groups of adults and children can gain a deeper understanding of Heifer’s efforts to alleviate hunger and poverty through a presentation, film, and exhibit tour. The presentation is focused on Heifer’s cornerstones, which are a set of values that Heifer’s uses to train their project participants before livestock is given, as well as their efforts to use sustainable practices. Giving exhibit tours and green building tours was also a
significant part of my internship. The exhibit tour is a guided exploration of the Heifer Village learning center, where our visitors learn about Heifer’s history, the countries that Heifer is working in, and what they can do to help Heifer end world hunger. The green building tour is an interactive visit to our LEED platinum-certified international headquarters where visitors learn about Heifer’s approach to sustainable development. Other duties included orchestrating “Heifer Hours” which were weekly activity hours where children made a craft while learning about the resources that Heifer’s animals provide to families in need. Some of my internship focused on gaining experience in customer service and office programs. This included working at the information desk, answering phones, welcoming guests, filing, and data analysis and entry in BBEC. Gaining experience in using this database was of particular interest to me because most large, non-profit organizations use this database. I also gained a significant amount of experience in graphic design and social media, as I was able to help design templates for a children’s self-guided exhibit and design Heifer Hour activities. I also did outreach for Heifer, which included traveling to different organizations and representing Heifer. I was also eventually entrusted with training new volunteers in these various duties.

Due to the multi-faceted nature of my internship, I was able to cultivate many different skills throughout my internship. One of the most valuable skills that I acquired this summer was understanding the importance of being able to adapt quickly to a visiting group’s needs. Although our larger programs required reservations, more often than not groups would arrive early or late and would vary drastically in size. I was really able to gain experience in quickly rearranging programs in a professional manner that would give our visitors the best experience while also adhering to our schedule. I also developed skills in customer service. When working
with nonprofits, it is very common for visitors to want to know exactly where their funding is going and what percentage is used in field work. These questions can often be presented in a difficult manner and I gained a lot of experience in answering these questions professionally while also knowing when to direct customers to donor services.

Two of the projects that I made a lasting and transformative effect on were the Heifer Village garden and the education section of Heifer’s blog. I was the first intern to undertake blog writing for our education center which allowed me a lot of freedom in writing my articles. Getting my articles published on the website was a long process, as Heifer is such a large corporation. I had to work with the marketing team to make sure that it would fit the format of the blog, as well as go through several versions of the articles with my supervisors. The end result was well worth it and it was very encouraging to see my articles published on the blog of such a distinguished organization. Additionally, I was put in charge of caring for and overseeing work on the garden. This involved writing manuals for our irrigation system, working with the garden volunteers, and advising my supervisors on what to plant and how to care for the plants seasonally. Although this was a lot of responsibility in a department that I had somewhat limited knowledge of, I learned a lot through the experience. Because I was overseeing the garden, I had to do a lot of research outside of work to make sure that I was making well-informed decisions on watering and planting. After the experience of supervising the garden, I thoroughly believe that I can adapt quickly in a professional environment and learn new skills thoroughly when necessary.

This internship has provided me with countless learning opportunities, some more challenging than others. Talking to very large groups of people during programs was an
incredible feeling of responsibility but also extremely rewarding. Being a part of people’s
decision to give to families in need was a truly transformative experience and affirmed my desire
to work in non-profits after I graduate from Sewanee. However, because of the responsibility of
leading very large groups, I initially struggled with gaining and holding the attention of my
audience. It was very difficult to reign in unruly groups of sometimes up to 100 while still
maintaining professionalism at all times. Throughout the summer I was able to attain this balance
and now have complete confidence in my abilities to speak to large groups effectively.

As I have stated throughout my description of this internship, I have gained confidence in
my ability to thrive in a professional environment above all else this summer. My internship
involved many different aspects of working in a non-profit and I feel extremely prepared for
future work in the nonprofit sector. I am certain that I will encounter tasks that require skills that
I have not yet acquired, and I am now extremely confident that I can adapt quickly to any
situation. This internship has made me so incredibly excited for my future in the workforce and
reinforced my desire to work for a non-profit organization like Heifer.