Paris Internship at the World Association of Newspapers

Over the summer I spent two months interning in the Paris, France, office of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA). It was an amazing internship and a great opportunity to work both abroad in a major European city and in a professional area that intrigues me. It was truly a global experience.

WAN-IFRA is a multifaceted organization that works with thousands of news entities all over the world in everything from youth engagement to the preservation of freedom of the press. The organization has been working to improve, sustain and maintain all forms of news, be it journal, newspaper or, more recently online, since the 1940’s and has grown into a massive international organization with offices all over the world.

My post for the internship was in the News Literacy Department under the direction of a long-time media professional, an American woman who has been working and living abroad for many years. She was welcoming while setting out clear objectives for the internship. The primary goal of her department is to help spread access and awareness of news media to those without it, and to create programs that help to educate people on how to best use and read the news. To promote this effort, WAN-IFRA holds an annual World Young Reader Prize (WYRP) competition each summer; a competition in which news publishers and newspapers from across the globe send in presentations on what they are doing to increase young readership and youth involvement in the news.
Managing the WYRP entries was my principle project during the internship. I oversaw the cataloging of each entry, both in digital and print form. This entailed reviewing each entry, writing a summary and reaching out to the project manager when more information was needed on a certain aspect of the entry. I uploaded each entry to a central Dropbox account, where the more than 50 entries could be accessed online by the judges. I was also responsible for contacting the judges to provide spreadsheets where they could enter their remarks for each entry.

While some of the tasks related to the WYRP seemed trivial at the time, it was what I was learning by reading through each entry that became the real depth and goal of the internship. One of the things I learned is that news publishers all over the world are coming up with highly innovative ways to get kids interested and involved in the news. They hope to encourage and make an impression on young people about the importance of reading news on a regular basis.

In addition to working on the WYRP, I also worked on reports for the WAN-IFRA News Literacy website about what countries have been doing as far as News In Education (NIE) programs. Part of the mission of News Literacy is to teach children now, while they are young how to really read the news and to look at it with a critical eye. An NIE program is one in which the news is used in education. It can range from something as simple as providing newspapers to schools to much more in-depth, such as providing reading guides and offering classes to teachers on how to best use news in a class setting. Compiling these reports required me
to go through the archives from WAN-IFRA, as well as from news organizations of individual countries, such as Les Journeaux Francophones Belges, to gather information about past and present NIE programs throughout the country.

I also had the pleasure of attending meetings at UNESCO and the French Foreign Press, in which partnerships between the two organizations and WAN-IFRA were discussed. It was a great chance to see the behind-the-scenes operations of one of the world’s largest educational organizations. I also felt like I was immersed in part of the culture of WAN-IFRA.

I learned some new computer skills and certainly fine-tuned others during my time at WAN-IFRA, as well as my French. While the internship does not require French, because of my intended French major here at Sewanee, I was often given - and welcomed -- tasks in French. These ranged from translations of presentations, to research, and to even contacting French press agencies to discuss an upcoming WAN-IFRA initiative World Teenage News Takeover. I also worked with the financial office for a few days, helping to complete invoices from the previous months. It was a good experience, nice to meet and work with another department, and a change of pace. I cross-checked invoices with receipts and entered the expenses into various tables. I was pleased that this work made a difference and was well received by the administrators who were up against deadlines.

This internship also exposed me to a very international work setting, with people from all over Europe and the world working side-by-side and only a few
paces away from my desk. It was an amazing chance to see what working in an international position would be like. On any given day, there were three or four different languages being spoken in various conversations. My desk was in the Press Freedom office, and so while I worked, I often heard the topics they were working on, such as upcoming conferences and the conflict in the Middle East. At one point during my time, two French journalists were arrested in South East Asia. It was extremely informative to be in the Press Freedom office during this time to see how the press and the news world were responding and reacting to this global crisis. Interning abroad in France was an experience that builds upon my passion for the French language and culture, as well as my studies at Sewanee. I am grateful for the opportunity and to have successfully navigated the work environment, as well as living on my own in a city like Paris during the internship.