This 2013 summer, I had the pleasure of working in the city of Kansas City, Missouri, under artist Phil Shafer. Phil Shafer is a graphic designer for The University of Kansas Medical Center and owns his own design company, Sike Style Designs. Sike Style Designs is an organization composed of both graphic design and t-shirt design, but not just limited to this industry as Phil has created a brand for himself in the Kansas City area and his business includes dealings with other art fields such as graffiti and fine arts. As an intern for Sike Style Design, my responsibilities included research in exploring the city, tutorials in Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator and networking with artists of Kansas City both in studio and work visits. Other duties included volunteering at Kultured Chameleon, a local art gallery in the city. Unlike any other galleries in Kansas City, Kultured Chameleon’s dominate focus of classification is street art. Tasks assigned here were hanging art and helping with promotions of artists as they hosted a number of different scheduled gallery openings and events during the summer.

Phil’s schedule outside of The University of Kansas Medical Canter was booked with working on a number of mural paintings in which I shadowed and aided him. I also assisted him in the studio on paintings or projects and helped with freelance work of graphics and brand logos when needed. These handfuls of responsibilities allowed me to remain busy during my stay in Kansas City and really opened my eyes to the art of time management and constantly producing varieties of creative ideas.

On the first Friday of every month in Kansas City, MO, there is a city-wide launch of gallery openings where the streets of downtown Kansas City are packed with thousands of people flooding into art galleries and business spaces that house works of both local and artist from all over the U.S. The doors of corner coffee shops, tattoo parlors, and small clothing
boutiques were all open and filled with walls of works of a range of mediums. Upon my arrival, I was thrown into the fire of aiding Phil curate Kultured Chameleon’s June First Friday gallery show. The name of the show was “Amo” featuring artist J.T Daniels. J.T Daniels is a local Kansas City artist who predominately works with graphite and ink composing illustrations that reflect his Catholic religion, childhood upbringing, and the influence of his Latin-American culture. I was assigned with grouping pieces of his work based on their color, concepts, and representation. I had duties of framing and hanging nearly 30 pieces of his work. Looking back, watching the full production of “Amo” is something I’ll never forget. The night of the opening was such an exciting moment after being behind the scenes of critiquing and planning a strategy of presenting Daniels effectively.

As the summer continued, I had the chance to contribute to painting a small mural, a food truck, and sit in on the development of an upcoming plan of a continuous project for Children’s Mercy Hospital of Kansas City, MO. The mural project is in place as a backdrop for photo shoots for the Madness Brand Clothing line. Kid Robot toy designer Jeremy Madl partnered with Phil Shafer in the spring of 2013 to bring a brand to life that is an extension of Madl’s everyday style. The food truck opportunity was a project Phil and artist Daniel “Lucid” Bartle were commissioned to do two collaborative pieces on the sides of the truck. I helped design the background imagery of the painted illustration. Through Phil’s successes in the art scene in Kansas City, Children’s Mercy Hospital approached him about wanting to use one of his ideas from a previous art show that would involve the interaction of children during a traveling health convention.
I was literally swamped in an unbelievably exciting way in Kansas City’s art scene while working with Phil. I had the opportunities of being introduced to toy designer Jeremy “Mad” Madl, art director of Children’s Mercy Hospital, graffiti artist Donald “Scribe” Ross, and up-and-coming artist Paul Smith. Through my time meeting them, I was able to hear their stories of successes and failures and gather advice on how to apply their experiences to my situation. I also met artists my age, who recently graduated from the Kansas City Art Institute and compared their perspectives of going to an art school versus my experience in attending a liberal arts school. I feel my time in an environment such as Sewanee that my artwork is strengthening due to my interest of identity in my work.

The most rewarding experience from my internship with Sike Style Design came after I had returned home. Phil recently sent an email that a piece of mine I made while attending a ceramics workshop one evening is being included in the UrbanSuburban Art Show Auction this Fall and I will appear in their 2013 catalog. The show is to open at the Epsten Gallery at the Kansas City Jewish Museum of Contemporary Art in September. The piece is a hand-painted functional dining plate. What’s even more exciting about this occasion is that not only will I be in a show with Phil, but also my Academic Advisor and department teacher Jessica Wohl is also in the gallery show.

In working with Phil, I believe I received a true feel for Kansas City and its emerging art scene as it is growing and thriving. I learned valuable tools necessary for entering the graphic design and fine arts fields. I left with growing interest in basic layout design, t-shirt graphics, and fine art, large scale mural production and even gallery set up and potentially curating. I feel as I had the ultimate experience of being around other artist and their work. It enhanced my
knowledge about different creative processes and experiences that has helped further develop my analytical skills in discussing art. It was also valuable to me that I feel I improved my public speaking abilities, both with other artist work and my own. I am convinced that the roles and responsibilities of this opportunity were directly aligned with my personal strengths and immensely contributed to the next ideal steps for my career as I continue to build both my personal and business portfolios while at Sewanee.