

Introduction

1.1 About The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars

The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars (TWC) is an institution founded by William M. Burke in 1975 whose objective is to prepare future leaders by teaching exceptional students the necessary skills to be successful citizens, businessmen and leaders of their communities and teaching them how to best use their existing knowledge and experience. In 2012, which celebrates more than 35 years of tradition and academic excellence, the founder's dream of more than 50,000 graduates and students was reached (The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars Website, 2013).

Their mission, as it appears on their website is the following:

“The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars provides students with transformational experiences that foster academic and professional achievement, leadership and civic engagement.”

The growing interest in improving the conditions in many underserved countries and communities has been fundamental in the program's success, which has resulted in the creation of community service programs that deal with several topics of interest, working in tandem with international agencies, non-profit organizations, local businesses and individuals for continuous community growth.

The Washington Center is home to 140 employees including associate members, advisory board and administrative personnel that serve more than 1,600 students every year. Students can find internships in thousands of local and international sites, including big corporations, non-profit organizations, government facilities, programs and agencies reinforced through their

partnership with more than 500 colleges and universities all over the world. These students arrive from 50 states of the union and 35 countries and have a 98% placement efficiency, an amazing accomplishment considering the broad range of possible workplaces and careers. The program includes 95 apartments divided in two convenient locations, 12 classrooms, a separate office building and a professional-class auditorium.

The program includes 3 main aspects: Academic, Social Responsibility and Internship. Each of these is planned in a way they can cooperate to better relate the student/intern to their workplace, community, interests and learning experience. Students attend twice a week to their programming and class, conferences and seminars every week, 40 hours of social responsibility service of their choosing additionally to their regular work hours. This creates a comprehensive program trident to bombard students with information, experience and a genuine desire to improve their communities and the world they inhabit. In order to join its internship and academic seminars, one must complete a program application.

1.2 Program application

As a student of UDLAP, the process to apply for an internship program at TWC is very straight forward: the student submits personal and academic information, program interests, liaison identification, two letters of recommendation and compliance to the program's guidelines. After completing these steps, TWC personnel review the application and consider accepting the student or not.

The process took 2 months to complete, but eventually I was accepted into the internship program. The next step was to provide professional curriculum vitae or resume for TWC representatives to promote around corporations and organizations that were looking to add interns to their workforce. Additionally, I received a telephone interview from TWC Senior Student Relations Coordinator Kinsey Holloway. She asked about the profile of workplaces I would like to have my resume submitted.

One month later, I received internship offers on my e-mail account, and I researched about my potential employers. I was interviewed for a total of 5 companies and organizations, from the Mexican Embassy to Amber Road, an export management giant. After researching, reading the job description and being interviewed by each company's human resources or managers, I decided a small organization named Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce would best help me develop tools and gain work experience for my future work plans.

After accepting their offer, I proceeded to apply for the J-1 Visa; a temporal unpaid work permit given to international students and professionals. Because the process was lengthy, by the time I was accepted as an intern I had already set a date at the American consulate and received my J-1 visa a scarce 4 days before my booked flight to Washington D.C.

1.3 Washington D.C. Arrival

I arrived in Washington D.C., the United States of America capital and most of their famous landmarks were visible from miles away: the Washington monument, The Capitol, The White House and many others.

I had two days to explore the city, recon the metro and bus routes that would take me to my workplace as well as making my way to my workplace to have an estimated time, on rush hour, that it would take me to get from my apartment to the GWHCC. None of the other students and fellow interns I talked to did that and as such, plenty of them were late on their first day at work.

The TWC RAF (Residential and Academic Facilities) was the building I was assigned along with 200 other interns, and shared room 107 with 3 other program interns.

As part of the program, I was assigned to the Business and Global Trade program, which would focus on students meeting for classes, seminars and visits to related organizations, such as the World Bank. Additionally, I had to choose from a list of academic courses of my interest, and was assigned to my

fourth choice, United States 21st Century Foreign Policy. It was a very informative course, as I learned about policy in other countries and how that might affect business. I was the only non-International Relations student in the class and Dr. Robert Henderson would often ask for my input in class on economic and finance topics which were particularly helpful to develop a stronger business language.

My course and programming were assigned on Monday morning and late Tuesday so they would not interfere with my internship, but it was still a challenge to balance class, programming and work.

I was assigned to the Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce as my internship site.

1.4 About the Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

The Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (GWHCC) was founded in 1976 dedicated to promote and assist small, minority-owned businesses allowing them to reach their full potential through conferences, seminars, workshops and work opportunities through networking with federal and private organizations to generate economic growth and well-being in the D.C., Maryland and Virginia area. More than 1,500 companies work together with the Chamber, from leading multinational corporations to one-man operations and everything in between. It is membership driven and the members benefit by receiving coaching, business assistance, advocacy, promotion and network sharing (Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce website, 2013).

The staff includes 8 members lead by President and CEO Angela Franco along with the department directors, with the rest of the personnel formed with interns that desire to gain experience in the diverse sectors GWHCC works with, from marketing and communications to accounting. The board of Directors is formed by 8 businessmen and women with prominent ties to their communities that use their strong influence to generate opportunities and expand the network and reach of GWHCC to gain competitive advantage for the members.

1.5 Mission and Vision

Mission

The Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's mission is to promote and facilitate the success of Hispanic and other minority-owned businesses and the communities they serve through networking, outreach, advocacy, and education.

Vision

The Chamber envisions building a stronger business network for the competitive future of the region.

(Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce website, 2013)

1.6 First Days of Internship

On my first day of internship, I was greeted by Julia Hobbes, Membership Coordinator and the person who did the job interview with me. Since the Chamber consists of 8 employees and managers plus interns, the Human Resources department does not exist as such and is managed by whoever happens to have less work that day, a symptom found in many small businesses.

My intern training consisted in showing me around the office and introducing me to 3 of the staff members. I was given basic instructions about my daily tasks, a corporate e-mail account and a basic guide through the website management software.

After the first week of work, I realized I had only met 5 of the 8 staff members; most of them did not remember my name and every day I would be given at least one task I had not been trained to do. Several of them consisted of learning from software guides, research or common sense; however, there were some very specific tasks that no one around the office seemed to know how to do. The most frequent response when asked “who knows how to do _____?” was “Magda”. Magda Cardenas was the previous Marketing and Communications Manager, the department I worked under. However, having left 2 weeks earlier, my supervisor, Pamela Nieto, was still learning at the same pace I was. It was not a rare occurrence that my own supervisor would be clueless about certain procedures and in particular about the different software we were given at the office. This led me to become interested in employee training and given my situation, Intern training.