Columbia Kenneth Cole Community in Action – Internship Reflection Essay

In the spring semester, I interned at America Needs You (ANY), a non-profit organization dedicated to providing first-generation, low-income college students with support in professional development. Each academic year, the program accepts roughly 100 Fellows, rising sophomores who stay with the organization for two years – until the end of their junior years. The program consists of bi-weekly industry seminars and workshops, as well as one-on-one pairing up between Fellows and Mentor Coaches, or experienced professionals, to help Fellows navigate through their college and professional lives. America Needs You creates original, comprehensive curriculum to train Fellows in anything from mock interviews to networking tactics.

As Program intern, I worked directly with Monica Johnson, the ANY Program Manager specializing in curriculum development. Even though she was my direct manager, I served as an intern for the entire Programs team and help with managers of alumni connections, internships, and event logistics. As a result, my day-to-day tasks varied greatly, and my smaller projects concerned immediate demands from the Programs team, such as researching resources to supplement workshop curricula, updating the ANY internship database, analyzing program trends and data concerning Fellows, and assisting with the 2015 recruitment and selection process. In addition, I frequently devoted Saturday mornings to volunteering at the ANY
workshops, which take place at various professional venues, such as John Jay College of Criminal Justice or McKinsey and Co. On those Saturday mornings, my main roles were to assist with Fellow and Mentor Coach check-in, and help deliver smooth presentations. Following the check-in time slot, I also had the privilege to sit in on some panels, presentations, or activities that Fellows are involved in: I was able to gain a very real sense of how ANY educates their Fellows through attending one workshop dedicated to “Interpersonal Relationships.”

Returning to company culture and organization, the ANY New York office currently employs six interns, including two Program interns. Since we communicated with different direct managers and had different specialized roles, we mainly worked on individual projects and had few overlapping responsibilities. One aspect of ANY that I love, is that the ANY team is completely aware of the needs and expectations of each of their team members, in order to make each individual’s – whether Fellow, staff, or intern – experience a successful and fulfilling one. Thus, the ANY Director of Human Resources and Operations assigned all six interns a group project – a spring social event for the staff. The process of planning, delegating (I was responsible for food planning and purchases), and hosting the event was immensely fun and helped strengthen bonds not only among interns, but also between the intern team and the staff.

In addition to the spring social event, each intern was asked to take on one long-term project to present at the end of the semester, as a representative of a more meaningful take-away from the internship experience. My long-term project consisted of two parts: I first created an online flashcard system to help train staff
members in knowledge of the first-generation college student sector. My second part – which I am still working on – is an initiative to extend the two-year ANY mentorship program to a third-year college senior follow-up. This part will consist of a series of emails to be sent out to seniors during various parts of their senior academic year. Interestingly, the Columbia Kenneth Cole Community in Action weekly emails inspired this idea!

As I implied previously, ANY and I have extended my internship length beyond that of the 12-week Kenneth Cole Community in Action program. My final day in the office will be May 14, during which I will make my presentation to the entire ANY staff. Since I greatly enjoyed my internship experience, I am completely happy to devote extended time to the organization. In short, I usually forget that I am working. In addition, I am looking forward to continuing to volunteer for the program through next semester.

I am immensely satisfied with my experience. Not only was I aware of exactly how I impacted the program and the organization, the team’s non-hierarchical, collaborative culture helped me develop as an intern as part of my foray into the professional world. All the challenges I faced were learning processes because my managers were more than happy to address any and all questions I posed. In this environment – one that stresses collaboration and transparency – I thrived. I developed meaningful friendships with Fellows, my intern colleagues, and managers and will continue to keep in touch with the people I have met. In short, I could not have asked for a more fulfilling first internship and will definitely cherish my experience this semester, for years to come.