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Mena Engineering Internship: Hikma Pharmaceuticals  
Reflection Essay

Being born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma was a wonderful thing. However, having the opportunity to attend Columbia University and move to New York City for four years was a giant step that expanded both my life experience and available opportunities. Traveling overseas for the first time alone to spend my summer working in Amman, Jordan is a perfect example of the opportunities choosing Columbia provided me with. This opportunity was as a part of CEO Amman working at Hikma Pharmaceuticals, a multinational pharmaceutical company.

The job that I accepted and did for the first week of my internship was a position at Hikma Jordan as a maintenance engineering intern. The job would have allowed me to experience the workings of a job in Equipment Maintenance, Utilities and Facilities (HVAC, Power and Control, Water Treatment and Construction), Validation and Engineering Excellence in one of Hikma’s sites. However the FDA planned a visit for the second week of my internship, and so they sent me to work in Hikma’s Mena division as a Mena Engineering Intern.

This position was only supposed to last for two weeks, but the project I started on began to develop and lasted the entire duration of my stay there. I worked with Mena’s machines database, which covered the 12 sites Hikma has in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. The internship consisted of a statistical breakdown of the machines in Hikma by distribution, supplier, age as well as reporting on top suppliers and local supplier trends. The results of the project were put into a PowerPoint presentation and presented to Mena senior operations director, and the vice president of human resources.
The internship allowed me to obtain an overview of Hikma and its underlying company structure as well as knowledge of the machines and suppliers in a pharmaceutical company. It also taught me how to create and give a presentation while expanding my Microsoft Excel and PowerPoint skills. There was a very large emphasis placed on planning and organizing before starting tasks in order to be more efficient. The most useful knowledge I obtained was an idea of how engineering transfers into the work place. I will graduate this year with a degree in biomedical engineering, but now feel more ready to apply to jobs in all fields knowing that many different industries have positions I can fill. The time that I got to spend at Hikma and the people I worked with were very hospitable. They wanted to ensure that I enjoyed my time at Hikma and that when I left my impression of Jordan was very positive.

Hospitality in Jordan versus America is different. In America it involves welcoming new people who cross your path. In Jordan the notion extends from coworkers to a person you cross paths with in the street. Many people offer drinks or food as a sign of welcome and will not hesitate to help in whatever capacity help is needed.

During the duration of my stay, the holy month of Ramadan occurred. Ramadan is an Islamic celebration where practitioners fast from food, water, chewing gum, and smoking from sun up to sundown. In Jordan it is illegal to partake of these things in public regardless of your religion. Many restaurants and cafes shut down during this time, so it became harder to find places to eat out. The few cafes that did stay open tended to board up their windows so that their clientele could eat or drink legally while the sun was up. For many people who celebrated this holy time it was not just enough to fast but rather to use the extra time in prayer. The concept of a “dog fast” was explained to me as those who fasted by sleeping during the day, this way they participated without feeling the burden of going without food or drink.
Ramadan is celebrated in America but only by Muslims, and it does not affect the lives of people outside the faith. Or at least it has never affected my life before. While the way this event is celebrated by both countries is very different. The main contrast I noticed was in something far more subtle that is constantly at play. In Amman and some of the cities I travelled around to visit the sense of time is less rushed. It is not that they are lazy but rather that efficiency is not as prominent a factor in daily timing. In the workplace, a lot of time was dedicated to thinking through actions before being carried out. It may have taken longer to perform a task but there was a reasoning behind the process that made future similar tasks more efficient.

While the differences in life such as timing were easily observed during my time in Jordan, others were not. A very large portion of their culture takes place on the family level. Family and close friends are extremely important over there, many extended families live in a complex or house together. If they are not in the same building it is not uncommon for them to be very close. Celebrations such as Iftar, the breaking of the daily fast during Ramadan, are typically held as a family together in private residents. People would cook all day for the feast that night. This was explained to me by some of my coworkers, but because I was staying in a hotel with other Americans I never truly got to experience an Iftar for myself. This is just an example of one thing that happens in private, but the behavior in a home can vary quite a bit from the social experience out on the street. People treat each other more familiarly and less regulations are placed on dress. The experiences I had in Amman were great, but they were still very limited from what they would have been if I had grown up there or had been living with a host family to learn from.
My time in Amman was enriching and parting from it was very hard. While I was there I got to see the wall carvings in Petra, to experience the desert stars at night in Wadi Rum, and to float in the Dead Sea. I will always remember my trip to Jordan as an eye opening experience, and it has encouraged me to continue to travel and to see more of the world. It has encouraged trips to Dubai, Jerusalem, and Beirut to be at the top of my travel list. I look forward to my Senior Year at Columbia, using my knowledge from work to pursue industry jobs while planning for the next chapter of my life with far fewer barriers and misconceptions than what I began with.