8 Weeks in Hong Kong

Strategic Development Internship with Asia Society Hong Kong Center

Jiachen Feng - September 8, 2017

Night view of Central (taken when the Strategic Development team had drinks after work)
Thanks to the CEO Hong Kong program, Columbia alumni in Hong Kong, and my lovely manager and colleagues at Asia Society Hong Kong Center (ASHK), I had a most memorable and joyful summer in Hong Kong. During the 8-week internship there, I gained professional skills, got to know many experienced and inspiring alumni, enjoyed the rich history and culture of Hong Kong, and picked up quite a bit of Cantonese. 8 weeks passed by so quickly when you’re learning and having fun every day!

A corner of ASHK’s rooftop garden
Internship at ASHK

Asia Society is a leading non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the mutual understanding between Asia and the rest of the world. Headquartered in New York, it has 12 global centers around the world and the Hong Kong Center is one of the most vibrant ones. Each year, ASHK hosts over 200 programs and events across arts, culture, business, and policy (in fact, one of the perks of working at ASHK as an intern is that I was able to join these high-quality events free of charge!).

The departments at ASHK include Strategic Development, Membership, Gallery, External Affairs, Arts & Culture Programs and Business & Policy Programs, etc. Strategic Development plays, in my opinion, a very central role within the organization - the team is responsible for raising funds strategically, maintaining good relationships with past donors and sponsors, and seeking new patrons and members. It works closely with virtually every other department on details of events, and oversees the overall direction in which the organization develops at the same time. Therefore, as a Strategic Development intern, I worked on projects that require great attention to details, such as writing exhibition proposals and putting together event budgets, as well as projects that require macro-level strategic thinking. Additionally, because the team is small, I was given many responsibilities from the very first week of the internship and was thus challenged to learn quickly and work efficiently. As a result, I was able to get a lot out of the experience.

The main project that I was involved in is a banquet where we planned to invite a Japanese Michelin 2-star master chef to Hong Kong this September to present a Kaiseki dinner for our guests, promoting Japanese culinary art in Hong Kong. At the beginning, I drafted multiple emails for my manager to communicate with the chef in order to persuade him to accept our invitation. The task was not as easy as it seemed - I had to use concise and clear language because the chef does not speak perfect English, and I had to be very careful of the tone so that I could be assertive without sounding too demanding or rude. It took a good amount of cultural sensitivity and patience to convince the chef despite his busy schedule. At the same time, I composed proposals that were presented to potential sponsors, including the Japanese Consulate General and companies from various industries that might be interested in sponsoring an event like this. I also did detailed market research in order to target companies and organizations that are the most likely to be interested. Once the master chef accepted the invitation, I helped my manager research and reach out to airlines, hotels, and food shipping companies to discuss collaboration opportunities. Meanwhile, I worked with
the External Affairs department to devise strategies for marketing this event. Throughout the process, I sat in every meeting with potential sponsors and partners, negotiating with hotels and airlines in order to get cheaper rooms and tickets for the chef and his team, and learning about how shipping companies and Japanese cultural organizations work. I am very grateful for the opportunity to be exposed to so many industries and to learn to communicate in a professional manner.

The colleagues at ASHK are also very nice people to work with, especially my manager, the head of the Strategic Development department. A Barnard and SIPA alumna, she is very responsible, energetic, and inspiring. Even though she is always the busiest person in the office, she made sure to set aside some time every day to discuss the work with me and lend me some insights from her 30-year career in finance, consulting, and academia. I benefited greatly from her wisdom and am truly thankful to have a role model like her.

Fireworks over the Victoria Harbor on July 1, celebrating the 20th anniversary of HK’s handover to China