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# Irregular Entertainment Internship

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### Reflecting on my Summative Report

Here I am, three months later, revisiting this experience that is both a frustrating and formational milestone in my career journey. Frustrating because, in retrospect, it seems to deviate from my intended career path, but formational because it helped me realize what my true career path should become. This past summer was an extreme learning and growing experience for me. I was forced to step out into a new world, a new place with new customs and cultures, and fend for myself. It was one thing for me to come to Western, moving across the country to attend a school where I didn't know anyone. But Western had mechanisms in place to deal with the kind of ambiguity I was facing. There were programs in place to facilitate my social integration and emotional transition. Moving to Toronto on your own isn't like that. There isn't a welcoming committee, there aren't mentors checking in to make sure you're okay, and there is no cafeteria with pre-cooked meals. Looking back on my reflection from August, I think the wounds were all too fresh for me to recognize how much pain I really was in. On top of moving to a new city and living with people I wasn't friends with, I was dealing with a fresh break up and the news that my parents were getting divorced. I'm bringing these events up now because I want to recognize the fact that these things impacting my personal life definitely affected how I felt about my work experience. I think that regardless of where I was working, my experience would have been tainted by the emotional stress I was under. That being said, I also want to separate my overall work experience from my personal life and be able to recognize that I still

did not enjoy working for this company, and I didn't not like it because of what was happening in my personal life. With this new lens, and time between now and then, I want to revisit the experience of my internship at Irregular Entertainment.

Below is the summative report I wrote back in August to reflect upon my work experience. Reading this reflection now I recognize the frustration that I was feeling, even if this frustration didn't show itself in my writing at the time. At the age of twenty-one, I find myself reflecting often on my life, and feeling as though right now my life is a blank slate. I find that when I read things that I wrote in the past, such as the below report, I can't help but feel as though that person was sheltered, and less informed. I feel as though everything I've done in the past has not counted towards my current state. I know that this is not true - I am where I am today because of the culmination of my past experiences. However, I can't help but feel as if I know nothing, as if past me remains in the past and doesn't venture into the future. I know this is kind of confusing to explain, and kind of irrational, but its how I felt when reading my own words. I will now leave the report here to be read:

### Irregular Entertainment: Experiencing the Irregularities of Toronto's

#### Live Entertainment Industry

It is the middle of December, and minus 28 degrees outside. I had gotten dressed in my friends' bathroom that morning in Davisville, and then took an uber downtown to Yonge and Queen. David Galpern, Co-Founder and Producer of Irregular Entertainment, bought me my second coffee of the day a few minutes later. We talked about his experience in theatre, how him and his college roommate produced their first play together in Montreal almost 20 years ago, and how since then he has produced multiple commercial theatre productions in Toronto and New York. My biggest takeaway from our conversation was Galpern's distinction between theatre as an art

and entertainment as a commercial attraction. “I work in the entertainment industry, not the theatre industry.” I left our conversation thinking how I, too, wanted to work in entertainment rather than theatre. I wanted the excitement and speed that Galpern seemed so passionate about. I wanted New York and big crowds and the allure that theatre brings to large audiences. I wanted the artform that has been part of my life for as long as I can remember, and that I have formally studied as a SASAH student for the past three years, to become widely accepted as a mainstream piece of art and culture. 5 months later, on May 7th, I would begin my internship at Irregular Entertainment working under David Galpern, and I would soon come to realize that I had been mistaken.

In my first year as a SASAH student, I wrote a fictional radio play script that explored the modern and postmodern qualities of the musical “West Side Story” as inspired by “Romeo and Juliet”. I was able to present my research at the Western Student Research Conference later that year. In my second year, I wrote an article that explored the aesthetic experience of Deaf West’s production of the musical “Spring Awakening,” incorporating American Sign Language and deaf characters. My essay “Deaf Culture on Broadway” was published by the Arts & Humanities Students’ Council. My SASAH journey thus far had allowed me to explore my interest in and passion for theatre, specifically musicals, and now I was about to begin working for a production company that was executing a summer remount of their production of “Grease”, which had been a sold-out hit in the winter when I had first met Galpern. My career goal up until this point had been to become a producer of Broadway musicals, and other mediums of performance including TV and film. I was ecstatic to be able to put into practice my experience from SASAH in analyzing productions, combined with my business education from the Ivey School of Business, to become involved in something I could be proud of. Prior to my internship, I understood that

while most of my time would be spent working on “Grease” as an assistant to the General Manager, I would also have the opportunity to work on upcoming projects as well. I couldn’t wait.

On May 7th, I entered the pre-production process 2 weeks after it had already begun. The show had been budgeted, investors had been secured, contracts had been written and signed, and the cast was in rehearsal. On my first day, I sat in on rehearsal. The cast was extremely talented, and they worked in a fast-paced, stop-and-start way that reflected experience and professionalism, despite the fact that most of the cast members were only a few years older than me. I was in awe - I could have sat there for hours. However, rather quickly, I became isolated to the office downstairs. It is not always common for the production company’s office to be housed in the same space as the theatre, but in this case it was. For me, even though the theatre was two flights of stairs away from the office, I rarely interacted with any of the production team, and I never spoke to the cast. This was not out of choice, but rather because my specific tasks didn’t allow me to. Leading up to opening night, the largest task I had been assigned was to organize all of the tickets we were giving away, to investors, the production team, cast, crew, media, the marketing team, and our office; a total of almost 600 people. All of the tickets were to be sent out and arranged in advance. While this task allowed me to build on my organizational and communication skills, it was very straightforward. However, it allowed me to understand, identify, and interact with all of the different groups of people involved in the production process, developing my interpersonal skills.

It became one of my responsibilities to arrange all of the complimentary tickets throughout the run for people from the Executive Producer of ET Canada to the delivery truck operator of our merchandise supplier. These connections allowed me to gain a three-dimensional

perspective of the people involved in the production. About halfway through the run of the show, I took over the customer service email and monitored all Facebook messages, allowing my perspective to expand and include patrons as well. This was a highlight for me, because it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of patrons' responses to the production. I answered every email, message, and phone call. I spoke to people on the phone who were yelling and crying. I mailed free merchandise to customers who were not satisfied. I learned how to practice temperance in a moment of stress. While some of these customer complaints were inevitable, many were the result of a few elements of the production falling off track. I was able to observe the domino effect created by one thing after another going wrong behind the scenes, and responded directly to the repercussions each of these mishaps had on our patrons, and in turn, our sales. My perspective now included not only external relations, but also the internal observations that one can only obtain by sitting at a desk in the production company's office for 12 weeks. While my perspective may be limited, I will attempt to explain and describe the trickle-down effect of each element that collapsed, and how the crumbled pieces eventually landed on my shoulders at the bottom, as the intern.

Firstly, it was both a blessing and a curse that this production was a remount. A blessing because it meant that for sales forecasting and marketing budget allocations, we had the best comparable in the industry. A curse because our sales assumptions relied too heavily on the success of the winter production. Summer is a much different time of year, and our show ran at about 30% capacity for the first couple of weeks. As an attempt to boost sales, the producers decided to invest in stunt casting the role of "Teen Angel" - a process that involves onboarding a celebrity for a short stint in the overall run of the show. The guest stars who ended up visiting were Mark Ballas, from "Dancing with the Stars", George Canyon, a Canadian country music

star, and Michelle Williams, of Destiny's Child (Beyoncé's former female group). After Michelle Williams' stint, the producers decided to cancel the two other scheduled Teen Angel guest stars, for a few different reasons, but primarily because they couldn't afford the additional costs. The impact of bringing in these stars was not realized, working in the exact opposite way they were supposed to, and sales continued to suffer. At the same time, due to creative differences, the marketing team that the producers had outsourced to implement the marketing strategy, which is also directly tied to sales, abandoned their partnership. Marketing strategy was then brought entirely in house, under the direction of our Marketing and Communications Director. This shift allowed me become more involved in the company's marketing efforts. However, it also meant that the previous marketing budget allocations were slanted and ineffective. The absence of the previous marketing team caused confusion for patrons. Everything was put into limbo, from promotional discount codes that were no longer active, to the communication surrounding these promotions becoming misleading, followed by the customer service inbox filling up and going unanswered for almost 2 weeks. Patrons also felt extremely let down that the final two guest stars were cancelled. The communication surrounding these cancellations was limited, causing more frustration. These were the yelling and crying phone calls that I received. With the absence of guest stars and the absence of the team who had created the digital marketing strategy to properly implement it, combined with external factors such as seasonality and competition, sales suffered immensely. The show was supposed to run until August 26th. Instead, it closed July 15th.

On a positive note, I was able to gain true digital marketing experience. I achieved my Advanced Google Analytics Certification and was able to run reports that helped us draw insights regarding our online traffic. I was able to compare these insights to the data I pulled

from Facebook and Google AdWords to determine the effectiveness of our marketing budget allocations. I coordinated the design and printing of all of our advertising on the exterior of the theatre. I edited video clips for online advertisements. I also took on managing all of our merchandise by running weekly sales reports as well as completing weekly inventory counts. I implemented an inventory tracking system that would generate more accurate amounts for reorders. Under the guidance and mentorship of the General Manager and the Marketing and Communications Director, I took on more responsibility and added positive contributions to our daily operations. I was able to apply my knowledge and skill set from business school to a project that fed my artistic passions. But was “Grease” really a piece of art I could get behind?

“Grease” is a snapshot of 1950s American culture, ripe with images of leather jackets and cigarettes, and featuring songs that make anyone want to get up and dance. But at its core, “Grease” presents a narrative that is blatantly sexist, riddled with binding archetypes for both female and male characters, and features homophobic comments along with asides that imply sexual violence. Overall, the show follows a love story in which the female desperately wants love and the male desperately wants to get laid: a narrative that we are unfortunately still familiar with in the 21st century. What I love about theatre is its ability to poke fun at these types of moments and create a commentary surrounding them. “Grease” does not allow for that. And neither did this particular production. While an optimist may look at the script and be able to read between the lines, arguing that Rizzo experiencing teen pregnancy gives a voice to young women who fought through a time without birth control, and that Marty falling in love with a military man is a tribute to our troops, by the end of the show the lines you never wanted to hear will still be ringing in your ears: “All dance partners must be boy/girl. Sorry, Eugene!” “Did she put up a fight?” “We’ll be getting lots of tit!” “It’s a real pussy-wagon!” “All the girls will cream



for Greased Lightning!” I couldn’t help but feel that while I was physically separated from the production by being stuck in the office most of the time, I was also emotionally separated from the production. I didn’t feel passionate about the show we were producing. I didn’t think it was a story that needed to be told, again. I wanted to communicate new stories, of inclusion and diversity and acceptance. There is value in studying the past to learn from it. But there weren’t many learning points to pull out of “Grease” beyond the fact that it’s not a great show.

This impression is my personal opinion, but an important one in the overall outcome of my internship experience. I was able to experience an authentic trajectory of a production in a turbulent industry -- one that failed to meet sales projections and disappointed patrons. I was able to gain industry-relevant experience by communicating with each party involved in the production, including patrons, and by assisting in executing and analyzing the marketing and advertising strategy. But, I was also able to stay true to my values. I appreciate musicals and theatre as an artform, but not necessarily as a commercial enterprise. Where do you draw the line between producing a project that you believe will change people's perspectives, and sacrificing your moral consciousness to sell tickets? My goal in making this statement is to not target Irregular Entertainment or “Grease” as a production, but rather to highlight the importance of my SASAH education. Because I’ve had the opportunity to explore the theoretical and academic complexities of theatre, and understand them on an advanced scale in the context of topics such as postmodernism and aesthetic beauty, I am able to recognize in myself the pieces of a production that resonate with me. I realize that, while there is beauty in the ideal of pursuing your passion as a career, I don’t know if I can morally balance my objective of making money to put food on the table and attracting a large enough audience by having to produce projects I do not believe in.

My internship experience taught me to reevaluate what it is I love about theatre, and why I wanted to be a producer in the first place. I wanted to be a producer because I wanted to do something I love and make money doing it, in that order. As with any career choice, achieving both of those goals is difficult, if not impossible, especially in that order. I realized that I need to understand for myself how far I'm willing to stretch the boundaries on either side of my goals. I realized that I value the intimate connections and conversations evoked by theatre as an artform more than I value the bright lights of Broadway. I also realized that I can always be involved in theatre in some capacity in my life, without having to make it my career. I value the experience I had this summer, and I wouldn't change anything about it. I'm glad that I was able to understand more about my field of interest through a real-world experience. Who knows, maybe one day I will produce a Broadway musical in New York City. But for now, I recognize my responsibility as an aspiring producer to produce projects that I believe in, even projects that may not exist. Yet.

### Concluding Thoughts & Next Steps

One of the biggest opportunities that came out my work experience was the opportunity to explore other options. I took advantage of being in Toronto, and having LinkedIn, and started messaging anyone and everyone. I knew from my experience working with Google Analytics, and my interest in consumer behavior and culture, that I wanted to work somewhere in the field of Marketing and Advertising. So I gathered information. I spoke to anyone who answered me, from entry-level employees only a few years older than myself, to Senior Managers and Presidents. For example, I went and met with a VP of Strategy at the Toronto office of one of the largest international network agencies in the world. I started reading for fun: a concept that had

become foreign to me during my chaotic academic schedule. I realized something very important: we never stop growing, we never stop learning, and we never stop networking. I believe that having been an environment where everyone is fixated on having a job immediately following graduation. But this achievement is not a measure of someone's entire person; we don't all have to fit into one, square, boring, and predictable box.

When preparing my presentation, I found it very difficult to capture everything that is written above into a seven-minute presentation. I wanted to deliver an accurate and authentic report of my summer experience but was unsure of how to capture the nuance of my entire experience – the external factors, the fact that I enjoyed some things and didn't enjoy others, the wide-range of work I completed, and more. However, I believe that my presentation was effective. The key indicator of this success for me was when I mentioned that I hadn't been passionate about producing a show like "Grease". This statement was met with many smiles and head nods from my peers in the classroom. I also felt the effectiveness of my presentation was captured in the questions that I was asked. One of my peers asked if I would have been more motivated to work on a show like "Grease" if I was offered more money. I found this to be an interesting question, and easy to answer: of course not. I was also asked about my interest in positions within this industry at a higher level than being an intern. This proved to me that I had captured the fact that my level of work was confined to being an intern, making the entire experience less engaging for me. I was able to explain that what really interested me about this opportunity in the first place was the role of a producer themselves. This is a role that requires years of experience and knowledge to be able to effectively execute. Until that time, no, I am not interested in working for a production company. I was also asked about Google Analytics, which I had highlighted in my presentation as an area of work where I was able to extract more value

from my work. This question thus highlighted to me that I had been successful in conveying my work experience to my audience. And finally, I was asked if I would ever consider working in theatre again. I was then able to explain how I will always be a dedicated patron to theatre, but I realized that I don't need to make it my career as it can be something that is always part of my life. Overall, I was very happy with my presentation.

I have completed several presentations throughout my university career. Through the Ivey HBA, I have competed in case competitions where had to solve a case and put together a 10-minute presentation to be presented within 2 hours. I have learned how to isolate key takeaways, how to speak confidently and announce clearly, and how to build effective and visually appealing slides. However, I rarely have had to give a presentation about myself. I am someone who often undermines myself and my accomplishments. I am self-deprecating as a means of being defensive and protecting myself – I make fun of myself before someone else can. I then have moments where I get frustrated and want to be recognized for my accomplishments, so I end up blurting something out that comes off as extremely condescending and pompous. It is hard to strike a balance between being cocky and confident, and between being humble and self-deprecating. This presentation allowed me to practice talking about myself and something I have done. Additionally, this was a presentation about an experience I had that wasn't completely positive, making it even more difficult for me to discuss. I don't think that this difficulty came across to my audience. I know that I present myself in way that hides my insecurities, which really only solidifies them because I never bring them up. However, I measure my ability to even discuss this situation in front of my class a metric of my own success. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to experience this type of situation, because I can't imagine another setting in my life where I would be able to deliver a presentation of this nature.

Overall, I am glad that I was able to incorporate this entire experience into my SASAH education. SASAH has allowed me to have so many different experiences. In first year, I presented my SASAH research at the Western Student Research Conference. In second year, I was able to go to London, England, for Destination Theatre. The majority of my research has centered around theatre and Theatre Studies throughout my SASAH career. Being able to work for a theatre production company as part of my SASAH education makes this feel like a fourth-year capstone for me. The integration between my work experience and my SASAH research is in the integration of theory and application. While many of the courses we take in SASAH are centered around theoretical concepts, we have also been able to “get outside of the classroom” and actually make things. In second year, I was involved in the production of Culture Crawl, in fourth-year we are executing an art exhibit, and now I was able to have my internship experience become part of my interwoven academic fabric. Being able to actually apply the skills and tools that SASAH has equipped me with into a workplace setting is part of what university is about. However, my university education is also about so much more than that: it is about discovering the type of person I want to be, and SASAH has also helped me to navigate this discovery. By being introduced to interdisciplinary schools of thought, by experiencing both theoretical and immersive learning settings, and by being exposed to challenges are all elements of my SASAH education that have helped me as I discover more about myself and the type of person I want to be as I contribute to this world. Therefore, I am able to zoom out from my individual work experience and see how it is part of a much larger picture of my life. I am able to let go of some of the negative energy and trepidations I had about my work experience, especially when I think about it as a comprehensive addition to my overall SASAH experience.

To conclude, work and life will always be a balance. Whether that work is academic, professional or otherwise there will always be parameters that we as individuals will have to fit ourselves into. Sometimes, there is more alignment between the parameters we are given and our own personal boundaries, and other times we have to learn how to expand those constraints; we have to learn how to not be complacent in the face of disagreement. SASAH has helped me to experience this discovery, and so did my work experience. I feel as though I still have so much to learn, but by trying something I will always be a few steps further ahead than if I had remained on a steady and predictable path. I have learned how to be tenacious, how to be discerning, and I think most importantly, I have learned how to be a little more at home within myself. These are the core learnings we as university students should expect to walk away with. I am proud to be in SASAH and proud that I have made these discoveries. At least, this is my interpretation. Because after all, we are all our own person. And I feel like I am walking away from this experience knowing a little bit more about what that really means.