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Impressive PR Internship: Final Report

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SASAH Experiential Learning

Dr. Barbara Bruce

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Impressive PR Internship: Final Report

Introduction

I have always wondered if I would be able to apply the skills I have fostered at university in a professional environment. For the past three years, every time I told someone I was getting a degree in the arts and humanities, in English, I would get only jobs about never getting a real job in return. I had lost some confidence in my ability to be successful in the competitive job market that prevails today. From the application process to my first day, I was incredibly nervous to start my internship and have all my fears and insecurities come to fruition. However, my twelve-week remote internship with a UK entertainment public-relations firm, Impressive PR, taught me so many lessons and instilled newfound trust in myself and my professional abilities.

Despite my nerves, I was excited at the prospect of working with Impressive PR as soon as I finished my interview. They made me feel at ease during the interview and more importantly, they made me feel that I was already a valued part of their operation months before I even started. Nevertheless, it was a bittersweet moment when I found out that I got the remote internship placement with Impressive PR through Absolute Internships because I was supposed to travel to the UK for the summer of 2020, but it got cancelled due to COVID-19. I was worried that a remote internship experience would not be as enriching as an in-person opportunity, but I could not have been more wrong. Not to say that I wouldn't have been content getting to travel and experience new cities for my internship instead of working from my room, but I feel that my

supervisor did not fall short in giving me all the training and tools I needed to get the most of this experience even from halfway across the world.

On my first day, my supervisor, Helen, expressed to me that Impressive has had many interns in the past, so there are many jobs they have carved out for interns within their company. She assured me that I would be given some exciting jobs as well as some more behind the scenes technical jobs. To my surprise, she told me they were also tasking me with starting an entertainment website that would be a separate entity from their PR business.

I sat in my room on a continent far from the Impressive PR team after my first Zoom call ended with nothing but my fear and doubt in my abilities. I felt that I had oversold my qualifications and I would never be able to perform at the level they needed me to. With each day, email, and early morning meeting those fears slowly receded. I know that the work I did for Impressive was truly valuable to both my development and their company, which is something I never thought I would have the pleasure of saying as an employee, let alone as an intern. I took on so many new roles and tasks over the course of this internship, and I could go on and on recalling all the different jobs I did, but I think the most valuable part of my internship that I want to convey in this reflection is the growth that I experienced along the way.

The nature of my work with Impressive PR

I had some preconceived notions of what an intern's work usually looks like—for instance, getting coffee or taking meeting notes—so I was very surprised when I started with Impressive and they expressed their commitment to my learning in this role. I know now that I played an important role during my internship as I participated in brainstorming and planning sessions; conducted research to support PR planning; edited videos and presentations; supported

relations with stakeholders, media, and vendors; assisted in tracking media coverage or PR metrics; undertook general administrative and clerical duties; managed social media; created an affiliate entertainment website; and subsequently managed and created content for the website.

That is not to say that every moment of my work was exciting. There was one ongoing task, listings, that was quite tedious. It consisted of taking information from press releases for clients tours or shows and filling in online forms on several event websites to get the events listed on them. Helen would always apologize when she gave them to me, because sometimes they came in the hundreds. I was surprised because I thought these kinds of mindless and tedious tasks would be the bulk of my work during my internship. Helen always gave me ample time to get the listings done and balanced them with other more rewarding or exciting jobs so that I never spent an entire day doing monotonous work. I always appreciated Helen's commitment to balancing my day-to-day work which showed me that there is a balance between work that is exciting and work that may not be very fulfilling but still invaluable to the operation.

I proved to be a fast learner as the internship went on. I had a few daily or ongoing tasks that stayed the same, but most of my work changed from week to week. I was always researching something new for them or flipping between writing articles and working on the website to emailing agents or helping with their webinar series. I quickly figured out that varied work is a mark of the entertainment PR industry. This made me incredibly anxious at first because I thought that I wouldn't know how to handle the next task they sent my way, but I found that I started to get excited to see what new project I would get to work on that day or week.

I could give countless accounts of the variety of tasks I completed; however, in the limited scope of this paper, I find myself wanting to reflect on a few deliverables that were the

most labours and enriching to my experience. One of my ongoing jobs was to get media coverage for clients and any tours or shows that they had coming up. I learned that it is important to spread media coverage between local and national or wider scopes of media to get to both a targeted and broad audience. To glean local media, I would adapt a client's press release to fit with a publication's focus and submit that to them with all the required media and information in hopes of getting that client coverage published. For example, I submitted many of our clients who had UK tours happening to Life Up North which was an online publication that focused on events and stories happening in the northern regions of England. I would edit their press releases for length and clarity and include only the tour dates that were taking place in the geographical area that the publication was concerned with. This is crucial because the submission of the full press release with all UK dates would be less likely to be published and we needed local media coverage so that more people in those locales would hear about the event.

Getting broader coverage is a different ball game and often requires pitches to larger media outlets. Of course, Impressive has its own media connections, so my job when pitching or submitting stories was often to get new media outlets to notice their clients and work. I completed a few pitches and story submissions for Impressive's clients later in my internship. One notable example was a pitch I worked on for a client, Eva Antoniadou, who was a spiritual healer with a podcast. I pitched her for a health-and-wellness feature to *Authority Magazine*. They responded to the pitch with interest in writing the feature on Eva, and I worked with her and the Impressive PR team to get all the required media and information to the publication so that they could write the feature. Outside of getting client coverage, I was also tasked with creating press kits for Impressive, which are a business tool to show prospective clients the reach in media coverage Impressive could facilitate for them. The opportunity to work on a variety of

projects allowed me to learn the ins and outs of the PR industry as a whole as well as the technical aspects behind all the work that is done.

The other large portion of my work over my internship was the creation of the Entertainment Now website. Impressive PR was founded by Mel Brown in 1998 when most of the press took place in print. They have transitioned to focus more heavily on online media but were still looking for a way to get more online engagement in the entertainment industry. I was on the project from day one and was given most of the responsibility concerning the creation of the site. It was a task that I would not have been able to complete were it not for my experience in SASAH which I will reflect upon further later in this paper. The nature of this work was a balance between creativity and hard, technical skills that challenged me every day. I would have weekly meetings with Mel and Helen to discuss progress and establish milestones within their plan to have the website completed before my twelve-week internship was over. I got to create the logo and help choose the themes for the website as well as set up social media and plan content structures and future outsourcing of published material. It was a long process with many technical glitches along the way, but we were able to get the site up and running around the eighth week of my internship, which subsequently meant that I was tasked with starting to write for the website. Although it was a daunting task, it was rewarding to be such a huge part of starting this website from nothing and building it into Impressive's vision.

I started to take great in pride the work I was doing for Impressive and thought a lot about my value at the company more than just how the internship experience could advance my resumé. Helen was very honest with me as my internship progressed. About halfway through my internship, she told me that they were impressed with my work so far and wanted to start giving me some more important tasks. I thanked her and expressed that I was excited to take on more,

but internally, I brushed off her compliments as something they probably said to every intern to keep them motivated. This was also the time that another intern, Ashima, started with Impressive PR, so I just thought that they were giving me a few more tasks because my previous work would then be split between the two of us. Much to my surprise, Helen held true to her word and started giving me new tasks that I hadn't previously done because they were functions that went on with clients. These responsibilities were much more important because Helen was trusting me to represent their brand, whereas most of the work I did before was only inward facing.

Additionally, Helen trusted me to train Ashima on some of the intern tasks which greatly helped me to establish confidence in myself and the skills that she already saw in me. Many students, like myself, experience imposter syndrome, and I think this is especially true for arts-and-humanities students who are told by almost everyone around them that they are completing degrees that won't translate into the professional world. However, reflecting now on all the work I did and how I felt doing that work, I see that my learning from the arts and humanities served me greatly to be successful in my work. This leads me next to reflections on how my experiences in SASAH supported me over the course of my internship.

Applying SASAH-specific learning and gaining perspective

As I discussed, a large portion of my responsibilities during my internship were centred around creating and working on the new affiliate entertainment website, Entertainment Now. This job was the biggest source of stress in my time with Impressive because I was worried I was not equipped for the task.

I started off by creating a logo and a WordPress page for the site. But that was about how far I would have gotten if it were not for the digital-humanities SASAH class that I took in my

second year. Luckily, from that class, I had a working knowledge of WordPress and simple coding skills and some experience writing for online publications. I remember sitting in that class wondering how I would ever use the skillsets we were developing when I had no interest in a technology-based career. However, it was all the little things that I had learned during digital literacies, like coding a link to open in a new tab and creating standard scroll patterns, that allowed me to make the site as optimal as possible for future visitors. I had the ability to design the website and plan the writing that would fill it while also working behind the scenes to develop search engine optimization (SEO) and code the website to be as user friendly as possible. I quickly learned with Impressive that there is great value in the ability to combine creativity and logical thinking. These were skills I was able to develop so well because of the slew of interdisciplinary classes I had taken with SASAH. Of course, there were times when I got frustrated trying to apply my learning to technology and it wouldn't work, but I could fall back on the other skills I have learned through SASAH, like creativity and professionalism, that allowed me to communicate my problems and collaborate with my team to find unique solutions. I saw for the first time that the professional world needs people who could understand both sides of a task and I could truly be valued in the career market for having interdisciplinary skills that give me the resources to combine my hard and soft skills to complete tasks I am given in creative ways.

I can't say that I wouldn't have pursued an internship if it were not a requirement of SASAH; however, the experiential-learning requirement did push me to enter the professional world so early. Working at Impressive PR has impacted my outlook on what my future career and education can look like. I only ever had vague aspirations of several career paths I could possibly take after my education, but I had no idea the vast set of jobs my skills could apply to. I

can now picture myself in a wider variety of career paths with a concrete idea of how I would be able to apply my skills. I have loved my time working with a PR company, and as I continue with Impressive PR during my last year of school, I will have a considerable amount of work experience in that field. This is an experience that I can use to show my proficiency not only in the PR industry but also any professional field that I might want to venture into.

Without SASAH I wouldn't have had the opportunity to take diverse courses that broadened my knowledge in many different disciplines. As a SASAH student, this internship was invaluable for me because I got the opportunity to put my skills to the test and see how I could apply the knowledge that I had amassed so far during university into a professional environment. Furthermore, I found that, despite all my doubts, the SASAH program paired with my Honour's Specialization in Creative Writing and English Language and Literature gave me all the skills I needed to perform at a high level for my first time in a professional environment. Now when someone asks me what degree I am working towards and how I plan on applying that to the job market, I can rave about all the possibilities that stand before me as a student with creativity and knowledge in many different disciplines.

Building relationships

Beyond interdisciplinary learning, SASAH places importance on teaching students how to conduct themselves properly in professional environments and build productive professional communication which were skills that served me greatly as I endeavoured to build relationships with the Impressive PR team. I could tell from the first few meetings of my internship that the Impressive PR team was like a family, provided a very hard-working family, but they joked around, made me feel at ease and, most importantly, supported in the work environment. It was

jarring at first because, on the surface, I felt that SASAH only taught me how to be properly professional and I wasn't sure how to communicate casually with my superiors. However, it was in the moments that I felt the casual environment resulted in miscommunication that leaned greatly on what I had learned in the SASAH course Introduction to Professional and Community Practices to successfully communicate with my superiors casually with all the same concerns that govern professional communications.

Beyond the knowledge of constructing professional relationships which I gained in SASAH, my time with Impressive PR taught me so much about how to conduct myself in the working world. It was during my interview that I learned the Impressive PR team was made up entirely of women. I was eager to be part of such a successful team of confident and professional women, both to learn from them and feel like a valued member of their team. I feel that this unique experience of working with a fully female team also pushed me on a journey to learn to conduct myself with confidence in my skills, a virtue that many young women are diminished for in professional communities. When I started off, I was very nervous about the work I was doing. I found myself ending every email with phrases like, "Let me know if this is not what you were looking for" or "I can redo this if it is wrong." One week, I didn't complete a press sheet in time for it to be sent out and I felt like I had failed them for the first time. I sent my supervisor an email explaining how horrible I felt and offering my many apologies. My supervisor set up a meeting with me the next morning and noted that one late task was not the end of the world. "This is PR, not ER," Helen joked with me over the Zoom call. "Even if something you did was late or wrong, you aren't supposed to know everything perfectly right away." I appreciated Helen taking the time to assure me not only that my work well done up to this point but also that, if it weren't, she would use it as a learning opportunity not a condemnation of

my abilities. As I reflect, I realized she had probably caught on to my insecurities and wanted to teach me that I shouldn't be so apologetic in my work. She constantly assured me that my work was more than passable, something I probably should have picked up on when they rarely asked me to even tweak things. Over the course of my internship, whenever I had a problem, she would provide me with enough guidance to help while still giving me the space to complete it on my own. This allowed me to accept that I might make mistakes and, if or when I did, I would be able to bring them to her with the purpose of learning and getting better, rather than offering apologies.

Additionally, I got the chance of working with Ashima, as I discussed earlier. I did spend some time training her, but beyond that, I collaborated with her on a lot of the work I was doing by myself before. I found this relationship so valuable because we could bounce ideas off each other and push each other to do exemplary work over the course of both our internships.

I built some of the most amazing relationships with Helen, Ashima, and the other employees at Impressive PR. The most rewarding part of these relationships is that I was able to build them on foundations of trust and value in my work. The development of professional relationships was one of the most beneficial portions of my internship because it allowed me to see my work through the eyes of individuals I greatly respect. Further, it remedied a large portion of my imposter syndrome because I was taught instead of scolded when I made mistakes and I was celebrated when I was doing good work. As much as I am proud of the work I completed over the course of my internship as I reflect, I am keenly aware that it is because of the confidence Helen and the Impressive PR team created for me that I was able to excel in my work beyond both the expectations they had set for and those that I had set for myself.

Lessons learned

There were some bumps along the road that contributed to my learning as well. It became clear to me that a large part of media management and PR consists of unanswered pitches, requests, and emails. I always felt like a little bit of a failure when my emails would fail to garner the answers or outcomes I was looking for. Helen assured me that this was a common occurrence, and I learned that all I could do was to cast a wider net. It became clearer to me that my work was valued and trusted by Helen and the founder, Mel Brown, and I started to gain more and more confidence. I no longer ended my emails with messages of self-doubt and, instead, trusted the work I had done. It was soon after this that I had a meeting with both Helen and founder Mel where she offered me a job with them after my internship was over because they were so impressed with my work. I would have thought that this would be the kind of moment that solidified my confidence in myself, but I found that it was already there. I was, of course, thrilled to be given this position, an opportunity Helen later told me had never been afforded to previous interns, but I found that I was no longer relying on the approval of others to value my abilities.

This experience was one of the most eye-opening times in my life. I learned many new skills and got to know the intricate ins and outs of a whole new industry. However, the most transformative property of doing an internship has been the journey I have been on to trust my skills, my abilities, and myself. It was such a unique experience to enter a job where your employer has very few expectations of you other than your willingness to learn, and I do not think I would have been able to cultivate my hard and soft skills in the same way had I not perused this internship. Not only did I get an amazing mentorship from Impressive PR, but I was also able to solidify skills I had already developed in school with concrete work experience.

I have done my best in this reflection to communicate the invaluable skills and lessons I learned over the course of my internship, but in truth, I will probably never be able to do it justice. Now I know that as time goes on, I will reflect on my time as an Intern as Impressive PR in conjunction with my learning in SASAH as the foundation for all the skills that I need to get where I want to go in my professional career.

Preparation, execution, and reflection on my Internship Presentation

In preparation for my EL presentation, I read back over the summative report and reflections I had completed over the course of my internship. This exercise reminded me of all I was able to learn and the skills I developed over the course of my internship. I did find it hard to distil three months of learning and work into seven minutes because it seemed unjust to such a momentous experience of growth for me both academically and professionally. The exercise of picking and choosing what to share did, however, give me some perspective on which aspects of my internship that I valued the most because those were the details I wanted to share. Prior to this experience, when someone asked me what I did in my internship, I would mention a few projects but mostly brush over it broadly by saying, “a little of this, a little of that” because there was so much that I did. This presentation allowed me to focus on the most noteworthy work from my internship with an appropriate amount of context so that I can better articulate what it was that I did to anyone who asks me. When the day of the presentation came, I was excited to share my experiences with my peers, university faculty, and all others in attendance. I was also excited to hear about my peers’ projects and what they learned. As a student in an academic setting as large as Western, I feel sometimes that my work is always going to be overshadowed by someone better; however, when I heard all my peers in SASAH give their presentations, I

realized that we all were successful in our placements because of our differences in strengths. It was freeing to get a glimpse past the confines of university where everyone is graded on the same terms to a professional field where we can all be successful and celebrated for the variety of skills that we each bring to the table. Reflecting on the entire presentation process, I see that value both in distilling my accomplishments and learning through my internship as well as the value that sharing my experiences has for my peers and a greater audience.

I also want to express my thoughts on the entire reflection process in SASAH regarding experiential-learning projects. When our presentations and final reports on our experiences are shared with anyone who seeks them out, we get to celebrate SASAH and share the positive outcomes that have stemmed from this unique program that focuses on interdisciplinary learning, professional engagement, and experiential learning.