

Haoyi Zhou

FL11 Internship Reflection

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This internship is not just about reading newspapers and having coffee in a comfortable office, although in my case they are part of my extra privileges. Having worked as an intern at the International Relations Office of the City of San Antonio for a semester, I not only improved essential skills such as official document drafting and event planning, but also enhanced more practical understandings of international and intercultural relations through communications and negotiations of intergovernmental exchanges on a municipal level.

My supervisor is Sherry Dowlatshahi, the Chief of Protocol at the office. She is a leader with strong competencies and extreme kindness. Elizabeth Costello is the Director of International Affairs and part of my work is to give her assistance on some paperwork and information research.

In order to make the internship maximally efficient, I managed to schedule all of my classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, leaving full time Mondays and Wednesdays to be devoted to my work with the city. I ended up spending at least 14 hours per week working at the office. It turned out well as sometime I was able to finish a whole project within the day by myself without worrying about passing it to another person the next day. This also ensured consistency of my work, and brought me a comprehensive experience of the whole process.

As an intern, a large part of my work is to help the directors plan inbound and outbound visits. The work turned out to be complicated. I was once asked to draft a meeting schedule for a Chinese delegation from one of our sister cities. Even though I have had experience with event planning and seen many examples of itineraries by former interns, I still found a lot of problems during the planning. For one meeting with some city department representatives, I had to try to negotiate the time that worked for everybody while trying to fulfill individual preferences. I also worked to pre-arrange the meeting location, media equipment set up, refreshment service staging, and so forth. On the day of the visit, still some incidents happened regarding time and technical miscommunication, but due to the careful planning in advance, the event went well overall.

Through the internship, I was able to get out of the academic bubble by having another “identity” as an employee. The field of my work forced me to always pay attention to the news related to San Antonio, from local community events to international environmental issues. The conferences and meetings I attended also taught me some useful things about international relations and the tactics of negotiation and interpretation. I met a lot of wonderful people from different countries and truly experienced cultural nuances through interactions with them. I also witnessed how those people found a way to overcome disagreements on culture and politics and finally achieve common interests to create win-win scenarios.

In general, the internship time at the office is very busy but meaningful. I even sacrificed some evening and weekend time in order to help with some important international events hosted by San Antonio, such as the Taste of San Antonio and foreign delegation conferences. However, the overall experience was worth my time commitment and I greatly appreciate all the people, including professors from Trinity and staff at the city that made this opportunity possible and fabulous for me.