

Communication Majors Continue to Secure Internships During COVID-19:

Director Kate Ditewig-Morris discusses the success of the Department's Internship Program

As a socially distanced fall semester nears its end, students are applying for spring and summer internships. Before the COVID-19 health crisis, students could gain real-life work experience by interning at office spaces and networking with industry professionals on a regular basis. Now, students expect to complete their internships from the safety of their homes by collaborating with colleagues and clients via virtual meetings. Despite the challenges of remote work, Communication majors remained steadfast during a global health crisis, securing internships and employment during unprecedented times.

Communication majors at The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign have the opportunity to earn up to six hours of course credit for their professional internships by enrolling in the Department's Internship Program. Through an online course offered in the spring, summer, and fall, the Program is designed to complement and expand the work students are already doing in their internships. When the University shifted to online learning back in March, Program Director Kate Ditewig-Morris promptly coordinated with all internship providers to make arrangements for students to intern remotely for the remainder of the term. Recognizing the novel circumstances of the semester, she made the decision to permanently change the Program's policies to approve otherwise qualifying remote internships for academic credit. Her goal was to ensure students' ability to complete requirements and earn credit regardless of their situation during the ongoing pandemic.

Despite anticipating a significant drop in summer enrollment, the Program helped nearly 40 students earn course credit for their summer internships. This amazing achievement was made possible both by companies that switched to remote internships and determined Communication students, like Lorena Esparza, who jumped at the opportunities. This summer, Esparza virtually interned in the Marketing Department at Mesirow Financial. She was also one of three tenacious young women who received full-time job offers from their summer internship providers. "The experience was amazing," says Esparza. "I learned all about the company's plan for the future and the different businesses within Mesirow. I cannot wait to return next summer as a full-time employee!"

Claire Mitchell is another student who secured a full-time offer. "Over the summer," she said, "I had the opportunity to intern with the Marketing Department at JSM Living where I discovered my true passion. I am excited to grow and learn in my new role as their Brand Ambassador." Another student, Grace Niezyniecki, interned in Sales Management at Pepsico. Her experience as an intern "was incredibly dynamic and formative despite it being entirely virtual." "As an intern," she said, "I spent ample time conducting functional research and working with my fellow interns to create recommendations on how Pepsi can better their customer service initiatives. I am so grateful to have had such an amazing experience and I look forward to continuing my career next July as a Sales District Leader in Chicago!"

After our tumultuous spring and summer, the Internship Program returned this fall. Thanks to the permanent change in course policy made by Ditewig-Morris, students are now able to apply their Communication studies to work experiences that did not exist a year ago. Within the course, students will explore how to maintain professionalism and ethical standards while working remotely, learn new technologies, and utilize time management skills.

COVID-19 has presented students in the Communication Internship Program with the opportunity to be at the forefront of changes awaiting them in their post-graduate working lives. “The Department of Communication’s Internship Program has remained not only viable during COVID-19,” says Kate Ditewig-Morris, “but also it has demonstrated its ability to flex and change in response to the sudden demands of the U.S. economy and the needs of our students. Our Communication majors have proven themselves to be tenacious, dedicated, and mature individuals whom we can all be immeasurably proud of.” The Internship Program is now accepting proposals for Spring/Summer 2021 internships. Contact Internship Program Director Kate Ditewig-Morris (she/her/hers) at comm-internships@illinois.edu for more information.