

Memorandum

To: Dr. Shelley Aley, Associate Professor, WRTC
From: Christine Wells, WRTC 495
Date: December 16, 2011
Re: Closeout Report for WRTC Alumni Newsletter Internship

Company

For this internship I was hired by Dr. Elizabeth Pass from the Writing, Rhetoric, and Technical Communication (WRTC) Department of James Madison University to work on the WRTC Alumni Newsletter. I worked with two other interns, Michelle Cecchetti and Lauren Bennett, and graduate assistant Meghan Wallace, to complete the newsletter. We also worked with a Web Team consisting of two interns, Christine Donovan and Layne Chappell, who uploaded the newsletter onto the alumni website. While we did not have much contact with the Web Team, their job was reliant on us and they could only finish their duties once we had finished ours.

The goals of the WRTC department, as stated on their website, is to develop students into writers and editors, to create a proficiency in critical thinking and analytical skills, and to form well-rounded expert employees that will contribute to the work force. The WRTC Department's Mission Statement is "The School of Writing, Rhetoric, and Technical Communication is a community committed to preparing its students – both writers and technical and scientific communicators – for lives of enlightened, global citizenship." This mission statement is a large part of why we want to keep in contact with our alumni. The WRTC department prepares its students to enter the community of technical communicators, and in order to do that they must remain open to others. To assist with that goal, the newsletter was created in order to keep them informed.

Projects

The main project for this internship was the completion of the WRTC Alumni Newsletter. Our duties were to complete a newsletter before Thanksgiving break. The newsletter consists of two alumni spotlights and six articles, as well as any pictures we can incorporate. The interns will have to get in touch with two WRTC alumni to ask them to complete a spotlight. We also had to research articles and compare our newsletter to other university's newsletters to consider improvements.

Of the six articles, I wrote three. My first article was a description of STC, both the national organization and the student chapter at JMU. The main focus of the article was to promote membership and show alumni the benefits of joining the organization. My second article was an overview of helpful programs that writers are using in their fields. I spotlighted several Adobe programs, as well as one Microsoft program. There is also a new set of programs that are being introduced to the professional world, Madcap software. The last article I wrote was on the CPTSC conference. I highlighted the conference and its goals. I also gave a brief mention of the major speakers and contributors to the conference.

I also was in charge of getting in touch with an alumni for a spotlight. After attending WRTC Day on September 22, I received the information for Elizabeth Sonnenberg, who was an attendee and presenter during the Transition to the Workplace panel. I believed that she would be a good alumni

to spotlight since she is still connected with JMU and the WRTC program. I also was impressed by her professionalism at WRTC day and thought that she would be reliable.

While writing the articles was a large part of our duties, the other interns and I were also responsible for assisting in the editing process of the articles. After our first drafts were completed, the graduate assistant Meghan would edit our articles. For the second draft, Michelle and I exchanged our articles to be edited by each other. After this set of edits were complete, they were put into the newsletter format and sent to Dr. Pass for final editing. When we received her edits back, we incorporated them and had our final draft of our articles, which were then sent to the web team.

Since I was under the impression that the newsletter was going to be sent out in a print format, I began composing an Adobe InDesign document in order to gather all of our articles and spotlights. I have had some brief experience with InDesign in high school when I was a co-editor for my school's literary magazine. Though it had been a while, I was still able to remember some of the tips I learned back then. While I was the main composer of the InDesign document, Michelle was crucial in assisting me and making sure that everything had proper continuity. Some articles were too big to fit onto one page, so we split them up. We also had an article switched into a two-column format in order to vary the pages. After the articles were placed, we searched and added pictures. It was this format that we sent to Dr. Pass for editing before Thanksgiving break.

After we received her edits and realized that the newsletter was going to be a web format only, Michelle and I reworked the InDesign document so that one article appeared on each page. There was one exception, the article on CPTSC and one of the spotlights, since they were short enough to be on one page. After the newsletter was completed, it was sent to the Web Team, the other half of our internship team.

The next project is to update the style manual we received at the first meeting of the semester. The manual did not need much updating, however Michelle and I reworded some of the points so that they would make more sense to future interns. We also added some examples to assist in the understanding of the points made. Michelle typed up the edited style guide in a list format, and I reworked the list into a style map. We eventually decided on keeping the list format, as it is easier to read, but I included the style map as well in case a future intern can relate to the format better.

Another project, which was added on in the last weeks of the internship, was to come up with a continuity plan for next year's interns. Since we had so much trouble this year with completing our hours and having a lack of communication with what our duties were, Dr. Pass suggested that we make this plan so that the interns next year will be able to complete this requirement. Michelle and I have compiled a list of ideas for future articles as well as a brief summary of what we did that was wrong and how they can come up with a better newsletter.

Experiences

I learned a lot while working as an intern for the WRTC department. I gathered real-world experience in working with other people and working for a deadline. I was unsure how to approach a professionally worded email requesting information or working professionally with other workers. The internship gave me practice with these points as I was the one who contacted Elizabeth Sonnenberg for her spotlight. This internship also gave me great experience with working for a deadline in a work environment as opposed to a deadline in a school environment.

This was a great internship, however I believe it could have been completed by one person, or at the most two. The internship was split into two branches, the Web Team and the Newsletter Team. I was a part of the Newsletter Team and our duties centered around the actual writing and editing aspects of the newsletter. The Web Team's duties centered around the alumni website and placing our articles onto the website. While I would not have been able to complete the duties set forth for the Web Team, I believe that one intern would be able to complete that by themselves and one person could complete the duties of the Newsletter team alone. Though I approve of having more than one person working on articles so that proper editing can be completed, it was difficult for us to get hours logged since there was nothing more for us to do besides writing and editing the articles. We completed all aspects of the internship that was required of us, but I only logged 65 hours.

There was a big lack of communication between the members of the internship. While Michelle and I worked well together and were in constant communication with each other, I rarely heard from Meghan or Dr. Pass about our progress with the newsletter. When beginning the internship, I was under the impression that the final product was a print version of the newsletter that would be sent out to all of the WRTC alumni. After our rough draft deadline, I received the edits back from Dr. Pass and she informed me that it was a web-based newsletter only. Therefore, all of the work and formatting Michelle and I completed in the InDesign program was unnecessary.

I also had to learn how to deal with a co-worker who did not pull their weight completely. Out of our twelve regular meetings and three outside meetings, Lauren attended around five meetings. She was not very reliable and as a result, I had to write a last minute article that was originally designated for her. While I realize that not everyone will have the same drive to complete their work effectively, I did not realize that it will sometimes happen in the work force as well as during school.

Recommendation

I would recommend this internship to other students, as it was extremely easy to coordinate travel to work since the office was on campus. The only difficulty I had was logging enough hours for the WRTC 495 requirement and trying to coordinate with two other people. I believe that this internship would be great once it is revamped a little. With only one or two people to write the newsletter and update the website, the work would be divided easily and there would be more opportunity to get experience with the actual writing and editing aspect of the job. The only problem with having less people work on the internship is that the intern would lose the experience of trying to work with several other people on a project.

Personal Growth and Change

After this internship, I have grown as a worker because I have learned what it takes to complete a project on a deadline. I have also seen that one cannot just sit around and wait for people to get to their work on their own time. The follow-through was something I was not utilizing before and have realized that it is an important part of a job where there are multiple persons working on a project together.

Around week five of the internship, I noticed that the other interns were beginning to look to me to answer their questions. Though I had no more information than they did about our project, I was the one who made decisions in a timely matter during our meetings. I did not want the newsletter to

be completely written and formatted by myself though, so I tried to make sure that everyone was given equal share of work.

I believe that this step up in my responsibilities stemmed from the fact that our graduate assistant, who was supervising our work, was not completely aware of all of our requirements either. She was a great help in editing our articles, but any questions we had about the newsletter itself were not answered because she did not know. This ties in to the poor communication through the chain of command in the internship, since she watched us make the newsletter as a print format and did not correct us, though she knew that it was a web format only.

Conclusion

I enjoyed my time as a WRTC intern and am extremely grateful for the opportunity to work within the department. Through the internship, I was able to focus myself and improve my work skills. After I graduate, this is the type of work I would want to do. I like having the extra responsibility of being more “in charge.” Though I am not sure that I could handle the full responsibility of a managing position since I do tend to procrastinate and work on projects when I have the time to, not necessarily when the other people I am working with have the time to.

I am thankful for the opportunity to gather real-world experience. I was able to learn how to interact with people at a professional level and how to organize my time so that I can turn in a product by the deadline. Though it is very similar to a school situation, I believe that the work environment was a good thing to be a part of. There are differences to working for a grade as opposed to working for a finished product that you are proud to submit to your superior. I did not realize that full potential before this internship.