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Design, Develop, Deliver

Searching for the perfect university was an overwhelming process because each school offered such diverse course loads and extracurricular activities. I looked at universities across the east coast ranging from 2,000 to 20,000 undergraduate students. I felt the most comfortable with schools that were somewhere in between those two extremes. When my family suggested applying to Salisbury University, I was hesitant because I had several family members enrolled in that school and I wanted to spread my wings and fly somewhere new. I would argue that there were other schools that were a better fit for me, but when I had all six acceptance letters laying in front of me, I could not see myself at any of them. To this day, I am not entirely sure what pushed me to choose Salisbury University, but I am eternally grateful for my decision.

Selecting the right school was only half the battle. Finding the most appropriate major and establishing a career plan was the whole purpose of continuing my education. I knew I would struggle in areas that involve math and science because those two subjects were always challenging for me. I was always fascinated by business, but I knew the prerequisites for the Perdue School of Business would not utilize my strengths. Instead, I decided to major in Communications with a focus on Public Relations. This has allowed me to increase my knowledge and understanding of business without having to work through my weaknesses. The communication skills required for public relations professionals are equally important as those working in marketing, finance, and accounting. I often tell people the key difference between public relations and marketing is we focus on people, not profit. I am comfortable having in-depth conversations with people, writing various publications in a media kit, and practicing empathic listening with others. I have absorbed incredibly valuable information while studying at Salisbury University, and each class has taught me more about myself and reinforced my strengths.

To be eligible for graduation, communication students are required to obtain internship experience. The summer transitioning into my senior year, I secured an opportunity to work with D3 Corp in West Ocean City, Maryland. This company specializes in web design and development, email marketing, social media marketing, mobile apps and sites, print services, search engine optimization (SEO), and e-commerce. D3 Corp manages organizations, corporations, hotels, restaurants, professionals, individuals, and more across the Eastern Shore

My internship responsibilities include working directly with marketing professionals on live client accounts, providing profile updates through content writing, determining the proper marketing strategies used for digital campaigns, updating live client websites using WordPress, and building strong SEO. I have learned a lot of extremely valuable skills that have made me an asset to this company. I am beyond thankful for all the support and positive reinforcement I have received from everyone at D3. At times, I would feel pressured by the wide range of assignments, but everyone in the office helped me stay focused and strive for success.

This internship experience has allowed me to learn more about communication in my prospective career field. Creating marketing strategies required collaboration and commitment from all parties, but problem-solving was equally important during each developmental meeting. It was difficult to navigate around everyone’s schedule when developing marketing strategies because some people worked in the office and others were 100% remote. Learning how to balance everyone’s schedule is something that I learned while working at D3. Having clear, open, and honest communication with the team allowed us to overcome every challenge. We would express our needs and work with each other to find solutions.

I felt like I was a part of something greater than myself when I first started working at D3. On the first day of my internship, I was welcomed by everyone in the office, received D3 merchandise, and was given my own desk with two monitors. On my first day, I arrived at the D3 office in West Ocean City at 9:00 a.m for training and spent an hour setting up work email, creating a slack account, logging onto the project management (PM) system, and going on an office tour. Afterward, I went over D3 posting procedures, set up bookmarks with saved login credentials, and frequently used tabs in Google Sync to allow myself to work more efficiently. My supervisor assigned me to work with the client success managers to get a better understanding of the day-to-day operations at D3.

Once I became familiar with the PM, I was able to create content for *exploreoc.com*. My colleagues would work with me to help brainstorm ideas and walk me through the administrative side of the website. I was responsible for updating business listing content and meta descriptions on a daily basis. I would complete this one day at a time by going through our administrative site and selecting the “info” tab. It was important to make sure all the general information was accurate and add to any missing fields. If there were no phone numbers, we would Google it and call to ensure it was active. All meta descriptions should have consisted of original content. Our team would use various sources and information to come up with 4-6 sentences about each listing. The goal was to sound natural in our writing as if we are talking to our friends about the business. We were encouraged to use the business name, location, and phone number in our descriptions so viewers could easily access this information in more than one place. Meta titles would be created if the business had more than one location. Working on this task each week allowed me to understand and appreciate the professionalism in Ocean City, Maryland.

Our team would gather relevant information for *exploreoc.com* from various sources. The PM had a secure list of different websites and newspapers that we could use to collect data. We would look for any specials, events, things to do, and news from local businesses. Every Friday we would go through the Delmarva Dispatch to keep track of the weekly activities and upcoming events. On Friday, June 3, 2022 my coworker came into the office with a large coffee and a copy of the newspaper with my name on it and said, “Congratulations kid” and pointed to my photo on the cover. We took pictures together at the Memorial Day kickoff event in downtown Ocean City, Maryland. One of my photos received a lot of attention on social media once posted on Facebook and Instagram. Since my photo was being re-posted by various social media accounts, the Dispatch decided to put it on the cover of their paper. My coworker provided a copy to my supervisor and encouraged me to keep up the good work. I was overjoyed by the amount of inspiration and motivation I received from my team and members of the local community.

Having my photo published on the cover of the local newspaper was an aspect of my internship experience that I am most proud of. I have always had a passion for photography, but I have never had the opportunity to pursue it. When I was invited to attend the Memorial Day Kickoff event with my coworker, Garrett, he explained that we would get there early to set up our camera equipment. I came prepared with my own camera, but I ended up using one from the company since they produced better-quality images. I took hundreds of photos while we were there so it was difficult to choose the best ones for social media. My coworker and I went through the photos together and published them on Instagram and Facebook. I enjoyed the instant gratification from our followers liking and commenting on the post. It was unbelievably rewarding to have my photo shared and published on the cover of the Dispatch. I received acknowledgments from friends, family, and colleagues shortly after the newspaper was released. I was pleasantly surprised by the amount of praise from my supervisor because this publication happened at the beginning of my internship. It was very rare for the company to have an intern willing to work overtime, especially on a holiday weekend. I took full advantage of this opportunity and I am thankful for the end result.

As I became more acclimated to the day-to-day operations of the marketing department, I was asked to complete the Sprout Social certification process. I read through recent release notes on Sprout before beginning the training process. After educating myself on the purpose of this platform, I completed the following sections of the Sprout training certification: admin basics, publishing, engagement, and analytics. Learning the administrative basics allowed me to familiarize myself with the dashboard and connect multiple profiles to the same account. The publishing feature was the most used because this is where our team would compose social media posts, select the optimal sending time, tag outbound content, share content calendars with clients, add to the asset library, and manage content activity. Monitoring our viewer’s engagement was essential to ensuring the success of our clients. This unique setting allowed me to set brand keywords, tag inbound messages, save replies, and create tasks for future Sprout activities. Profile and post-performance reports would be accessed from the analytics feature. I was responsible for pulling these resorts and sending them to my team for review. This information would be sent to our clients with a breakdown of each component. I have thoroughly enjoyed using Sprout on a daily basis because it provided me with a plethora of valuable information.

During my third week of working at D3, I learned the importance of our phone call procedures. Before answering my first call, my team provided a phone tree and documents about proper phone etiquette. It is essential that someone from the office picks up the phone within 3 rings, and answers with: "Good (morning, afternoon), thank you for calling D3, this is (your name), how may I help you?" It is imperative that you request the name and company that you are speaking to so you can provide those details to the person receiving the call. You should never use slang when speaking to a client. It is important to be courteous when addressing the client by asking them if they are okay with being placed on hold before doing so, or asking if someone else can assist them if the person requested is unavailable. Before hanging up the phone, we should always ask if the client needs anything else.

Being given the responsibility to answer the phone and speak to clients directly allowed me to understand the different departments at D3 in more detail. Clients would often call with specific questions or requests and it was my job to answer them with confidence. Usually, I would receive calls regarding website updates which would be completed by our client service managers or development department. I became very familiar with everyone in each department because I would transfer calls or information to them on a daily basis. I worked with one of the lead client service managers to go over the D3 ticket system. Whenever a client sends an email requesting an update or reporting a problem, we refer to it as a "ticket" and create a task in our project management (PM) system. It is essential that someone from the D3 teams responds to clients in a timely manner and keeps track of all the tickets and tasks.

The training for the ticket system was intense because every day would be different. I continued learning how to use the D3 ticket system and I was asked to make tasks/edits for various clients using the PM. It was imperative to fully understand what the client is requesting so I could relay the message to the proper department. A majority of the tickets that I dealt with involved quick website updates. If I was given admin access, I would make the updates myself rather than assign them to someone else in the office. If I were to reassign an edit to a different person, I would have to provide detailed step-by-step instructions. Developers usually do not hear from the client directly so they rely on the client service managers to relay the right request. I have enjoyed this learning experience because I have been given proper training on how to manage tickets/tasks and make updates using WordPress.

As I completed my internship, the office supervisor, Laurie, asked me a couple of questions regarding my experience. Our conversation started with *exploreoc.com* and how I’ve become an asset to the company by learning how to enter events using the unique administrative platform. Laurie explained how I adapted quickly to the various content management systems, and the D3 team would love to have me continue to work part-time during the school year. I explained that I would be comfortable continuing to work with them because everyone has been super supportive and encouraging. Laurie and I agreed that most of the tasks regarding *exploreoc.com* can be completed independently so this would be ideal for a part-time employee. When Laurie asked me about the work I’ve done related to client services, I explained that I have enjoyed working with everyone in this department, but I would often lack confidence in my work and turn to them for help. Laurie appreciated the fact that I would check my work with my colleagues, but she proceeded to provide constructive feedback. I enjoyed hearing her observations because they allowed me to view my contributions from another perspective. I felt disappointed in myself for not being able to contribute more questions to our conversation because I believe that would have helped us both learn something new about our work habits. Next time I will be more prepared for this type of meeting because it helps everyone to provide appropriate feedback.

Working at D3 has allowed me to fully understand the public relations track of the Communication major because I have applied everything I have learned from my classes. The class that has helped me the most was Business and Professional Communication. In this course, we learned how to effectively communicate via email which I used daily at D3. Whether I was discussing information with clients or coworkers, I always kept the conversation short and sweet. It was essential for me to be concise when communicating with my team because everyone was responsible for completing their requests in a timely manner, so it was my duty to be direct and to the point. Whenever I updated clients, I would always check to see if the message had a subject line, I would address them by name, and attach my D3 signature at the end of every message. Sometimes, I would call the client for clarification rather than email them because that would ensure a quick response. The information I learned in Business and Professional Communication at Salisbury University has helped me become more successful in all of my personal and professional relationships.

Overall, I am pleased with my decision to attend Salisbury University with a major in Communications. The public relations track has been very suitable for me because I have been able to apply everything I learned from the prospective courses. This major has allowed me to utilize my existing strengths as well as build new ones. I am proud of myself for being able to secure a job after my internship with D3. This company has allowed me to experience the ins and outs of marketing with live clients. I was able to learn how to develop digital marketing strategies, update websites using WordPress, and frequently curate content. I enjoyed going through training on how to build a strong SEO because you can see the results come full circle. This internship experience allowed me to appreciate my career choice and work towards achieving appropriate goals.