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ARTHUM 4490

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Final Reflection- MMM Hamilton-Niagara

This past summer, I had the pleasure of working as a Social Media Specialist for the Hamilton-Niagara branch of the Multiple Myeloma March (HNMMM) - an annual nationwide initiative that raises awareness and funds for multiple myeloma, a rare and often overlooked blood cancer. Over the course of four months (from early June to early September), my main responsibility was to establish and grow the branch's Instagram presence in the lead-up to the big event, which took place on September 13. Since this was the launch of a new page, much of my focus centered on building visibility, generating engagement, and driving interest under a tight deadline.

While content creation for Instagram and Facebook was at the core of my role - planning, designing, and publishing posts that balanced informative messaging with emotionally resonant storytelling - I also contributed behind the scenes: researching current social media trends to inform our strategy, regularly pitching content ideas inspired by trends in the broader nonprofit and health awareness space, and analyzing how similar organizations engaged their own audiences. Beyond the creative and strategic work, I conducted preliminary grant research to find potential funding opportunities. Although these efforts didn't lead to immediate results, they gave me some preliminary insight into how nonprofits go about financial sustainability beyond individual campaigns.

What made this experience even more meaningful was the personal connection I had, and still have, to the cause. I was drawn to the role not only because of the creative opportunities it offered, but also due to a recent development in my own life, where I learned that one of my parents is facing a rare form of cancer. It isn't multiple myeloma, but another under-discussed diagnosis that has been difficult to navigate, reminding me the importance of advocacy and awareness, especially for underrepresented health issues. It ultimately shaped how I approached my work with HNMMM - prioritizing care and intentionality, and making sure each patient's story was handled with sensitivity, respect, and thoughtfulness.

This personal tie made the collaborative atmosphere of this internship all the more impactful, and although the program was entirely virtual, it still felt immersive and communal. I was (extremely) lucky to work under the guidance of an immensely supportive supervisor named Heaton. His mentorship truly made all the difference. We met nearly every week via Zoom, along with another member of the social media team, to discuss content and strategy. Right off the bat, Heaton had asked us to conceptualize social media as a space for experimentation rather than the pursuit of perfection: that content creation is a repetitive process of testing, learning, and adapting to find what effectively engages an audience. This initial piece of advice set the tone for what would become our ongoing open discussions. He perfected the balance between professional guidance and encouraging our creative input.

It's thanks to Heaton that I was able to combat my biggest challenge during this internship... my own self-doubt. I often lack confidence when entering new or unfamiliar environments, hesitating to speak up in meetings, assert myself, or share ideas that I feel unworthy. Heaton saw this, and made a point to reach out personally when he noticed I was quieter in meetings. These one-on-one conversations became the space where I felt able to

contribute, and the ideas I had assumed were ‘bad’ or amateur were met with enthusiasm. It was those moments of encouragement that built my confidence.

Beyond the whole self-doubt thing, I also developed practical skills in managing feedback and navigating disagreements professionally. There were times when I had to challenge the creative ideas of the other media assistant - something I found uncomfortable, but ultimately necessary. These moments taught me not only how to provide constructive criticism but also how to professionally defend my *own* ideas when the situation required it. This was particularly important given that I was giving feedback to those significantly older than me - people with full-time jobs and families: veterans in the work world - which made me question whether I had anything to offer at all. Yet, as time went on, I warmed to the idea that age and experience aren't the only qualifiers for contributing value to a team.

In terms of day-to-day tasks, Heaton provided me with a master list of projects at the start of the internship. This list included social media post ideas, video concepts, patient editorial features, and event promotional content. One of the more creative and enjoyable projects was creating an aesthetic for the brand's new Instagram page. I drew on my previous experience (shout-out to those production classes) for visual storytelling, colour schemes, fonts, and imagery in order to make a page that felt professional, and most importantly, human. Other responsibilities involved additional outreach, such as contacting team captains and past marchers for photos and quotes, or conducting interviews with patients about their journeys with myeloma. These interviews were especially moving; it was a privilege to hear such open, personal stories.

Through this work, I gained both technical and interpersonal skills that I hope to carry into future professional settings. On the technical side, I became more confident creating platform-specific content using design and editorial tools. I improved my writing - from crafting

concise social media captions to developing in-depth patient features - and gained experience in outreach, grant research, and event promotion. Interpersonally, I learned to adapt within fast-paced, collaborative environments, communicate more effectively (especially around feedback), and navigate team dynamics with better emotional intelligence. Most importantly, I began to see myself not just as a student, but as someone capable of contributing meaningfully in a professional context.

The remote nature of the internship also helped me build independence. At first, time management was a real challenge; without the structure of a traditional workday, I found it difficult to create a sustainable routine. But as the march date approached and deadlines became more urgent, I adapted, learning to self-direct and follow through on things without external prompts.

The structure of this internship felt similar to the seminar-style, discussion-based format of many SASAH courses. Both settings combined creativity and interdisciplinarity, with space for open dialogue, collaboration, and critical reflection. This foundation helped me navigate meetings, contribute to team discussions (even if done in one-on-one settings with Heaton), and respond constructively to feedback. The writing-intensive nature of my coursework also prepared me for the editorial aspects of the role, while the experience with arts-based projects gave a head start on visual and design-related tasks. In these ways, the internship felt like a natural extension of the work already done in the classroom, but with real-world stakes and audiences.

Possibly the most meaningful insight I gained from this experience was the realization that while I care deeply about advocacy and purpose-driven work, I'm most fulfilled in creative environments. This entire experience made this clear - my interest is in spaces like media, film, and the arts - fields where storytelling is at the forefront. Heaton remains an important

professional contact, particularly given his background in journalism, and I hope to stay connected to the march, whether through future participation or continued support of their awareness efforts.

Overall, I didn't feel entirely prepared when I applied, but taking that step regardless was ultimately rewarding. The experience helped me recognize how my existing skills could translate beyond an academic setting and gave me a better sense of how I might begin to navigate professional spaces. It didn't solve every uncertainty about what comes next, but it made the path forward feel a bit more grounded.