This summer I was fortunate enough to intern at Native Collaboration in Richmond, Virginia as the Public Relations and Marketing Intern. Native Collaboration is a small, boutique communication agency with experience in a wide range of fields including non-profits, film, medical, aviation and fashion. I would describe Native as small but powerful; As a younger agency in the Richmond area, they have grown significantly over the past three years. Their clients span over several industries and are located around the globe. While many clients have been local, many other clients are located around the world, from Washington, DC to Barcelona, from Dubai to Miami.

My internship this summer at Native was unique because it was not my first Native experience. Last summer, I also interned at Native as a marketing intern. In Summer 2015, I was one of 5 other interns helping to support a staff of 3 full-time employees and my formal experience in marketing and PR was limited. I quickly learned so much about working for an agency and soon found an interest in the more logistical aspects of PR: writing, editing, research. I am so thankful to have returned to Native this summer to further the advancement of those skills while also being exposed to new aspects of the business. Over the past year, Native has continued to grow and expand in both influence and size. This summer, I was the sole intern helping to assist a full-time staff of now eight employees. This marked a significant shift in my role in the office. Also transitioning from a part-time intern to a full-time intern meant that I felt much more like a regular employee than an intern.

My role as a Public Relations and Marketing intern this summer meant that my main responsibility was to assist the Partners and Account Manager while working with the graphic design team members to help with general client needs. One skill that I focused on this summer
was that of copywriting and editing. Because of the addition of two full-time graphic designers, Native has been able to produce more collateral in-house and therefore there was an increased need for copy writing and editing. My role in this process was to help draft copy for marketing materials as well as be an important last step in the editorial process as a final eyes on all projects checking for any errors. This ranged from social media posts to brochures to full client reports, as well as Native’s own marketing materials. For example, when Native launched their new website during my first week, I was tasked with ensuring there were no spelling errors and that the flow of the website made sense, helping to catch any errors before the site went live.

Another new skill that I acquired this summer was assisting in business development for Native. This included general research into possible networking events and conferences to attend, new trends in the marketing world and potential new businesses to reach out to. Included in this was learning about RFP’s. “Requests for Proposals” or “RFP’s” are solicitations for bids and are required for all government projects. For example, the Department of Transportation might post an RFP for bids from construction companies when building a new toll road, giving everyone a “fair” chance to be considered for the project. These RFP’s can include marketing and public relations bids in which a company will put together a full proposal as to what their plans would be if given the job. Prior to working at Native this summer, I was unaware of this process but was asked to research current RFP’s in the Virginia area as part of my business development research. Throughout the summer, we completed three proposals for various marketing projects in Virginia. I helped look for RFP’s, research those potential projects and businesses and finally, edit and proof proposals before delivering them to the appropriate agencies. It was very interesting to learn about this practice as well as be involved in the entire process from start to finish.
While business development and copywriting were new focuses of my job at Native, I was also able to build upon my skills learned last summer, including writing press releases, social media posts and press pitches. One of my favorite aspects of public relations is press outreach. This summer, I worked with Native’s interior design client, Piret Johanson Studios, to help secure several editorial mentions. My responsibilities included researching potential magazines, websites, and blogs to pitch Piret’s designs followed by sending unique pitch emails tailored to each magazine’s editors. Another project type I helped with was event prep. This July, Native’s client, the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation (VOC), a non-profit dedicated to educating those on the modern impact and prevalence of communism around the globe, hosted the Washington, D.C. premiere of the documentary film, *Havana Motor Club*. My initial involvement was to watch the film and pull quotes to be used for social media posts promoting the event. The most significant task in helping prepare for the event was to help increase ticket sales by researching groups that might be interested in attending the event and either emailing or calling them explaining the premiere. One of my favorite things about this kind of event prep is helping think through unique groups to invite. For this event, I researched car clubs, film societies and local universities’ history and Latin American studies programs and reached out to all of them. I loved being able to tell these groups about the event and why they might enjoy it. The showing was a success and I’m glad I was able to assist in promoting the event and work of VOC.

My experience at Native this summer helped me learn more about an industry that I think is ever-growing and relevant in today’s world; Nearly every company has a marketing director. While I would love to continue to work in some aspect of marketing and/or public relations in the future, even if I decide not to work for a company like Native, I feel confident that the skills I
have learned will be relevant in almost any job. I am grateful to have been able to build upon my skills learned last summer and help to diversify my skill set and be more well rounded in my approach to marketing. I think I was able to learn so much more as a returning intern by eliminating some of the learning curve evident when new to an office. The increase in hours worked as well as new clients meant that not only was my job more challenging and different than previous experiences but I was also able to see what working for an agency of Native’s size might be like when I graduate.

My internship this summer at Native was very helpful in solidifying my public relations skills. I was nervous that as a returning intern that my two internships at Native would be nearly indistinguishable and that I would be doing the exact same thing this summer that I had done last summer. But because of the growth of Native, my roles and responsibilities grew and morphed over the year. I was able to build upon my skills from Summer 2015 and jump right into my new role in 2016. As the only intern and with an increase in responsibilities, I felt much more like a full-time employee than an intern. Rather than being one of many interns, my summer at Native showed me what a full-time position at a marketing agency would look like. I am confident that with the skills I learned this summer that I will be able to apply those skills to future jobs. I am grateful for my internship and Native, with the support of Sewanee, for helping to further improve the skills necessary for pursuing a career in marketing and public relations.