This summer I was fortunate enough to intern for Cullman and Kravis, a prominent interior design firm in New York City. The firm is owned and managed by Ellie Cullman, a New York native and acclaimed interior designer. Ellie started Cullman and Kravis in 1984 with the vision of building a company grounded in design excellence and personal service. Cullman and Kravis is dedicated to their mission of designing homes that reflect the personality of their clients while adhering to their established budget. The office consists of thirteen female employees; four Design Partners, eight Project Managers and the Chief Operating Officer. Each designer is devoted to helping one another, creating an atmosphere full of positive and collaborative energy.

There are four design teams who work individually on projects in order to uphold the company’s unique “modern traditional” aesthetic. Cullman and Kravis typically employs three to four interns year round, one for each team. This summer I worked along side only one other intern, which gave me the opportunity to work on many projects and take on many responsibilities.

My day would begin with an 8am commute to the Upper East Side and would end around 5 or 6 every evening. The office was beautiful, entirely white with windows for walls and large tables spread throughout covered in fabric samples, floor plans and different home accessories. I would arrive to an office full of smiling faces and funny stories from the night before. My little black notebook would soon be full with errands to run, phone calls to make and emails to send. I would complete whichever tasks were urgent first, and then leave my office on Madison Avenue to navigate the crazy streets of New York City. My errands included, for example, returning design accouterments, picking up lamps and table pieces, and making deliveries to clients’ apartments. My most common errand was to the Decoration and Design building located on 3rd Avenue. The D & D consists of 18 floors, with about 5 to 8 showrooms on each floor. In each
showroom you will find a plethora of fabrics and furniture, enjoyable from far away but incredibly overwhelming up close. Here I would search for specific samples or fabrics I thought could work well in a particular project. It was always incredibly gratifying when I picked out a fabric that the client chose to use.

Ellie Cullman and associates make an annual trip to Europe every summer where they look for antiques and artwork for their clients. One of my responsibilities was to communicate with the French and English antique dealers. I would request photos, prices and information on the products marked by Ellie and her team. After reading hundreds of emails, I would print pictures of the acquisitions, convert euro prices to dollars and summarize the information provided. The antiques and artwork were placed into categories, priced, and assembled into large binders for Ellie to look through with clients. During this process I arrived at work early in the mornings and often brought work home at night in order to complete the binders before Ellie and her team returned from Europe. This was a big responsibility and a complicated process but my hard work was acknowledged by the team.

One skill I developed this summer was my ability to match colors. My painting classes at Sewanee have required me to mix colors well in order to duplicate objects on canvas or invent new colors from my mind. Throughout my internship I was constantly being presented with the challenge of matching fabric colors to other fabrics, wallpapers or room accessories. I was able to strengthen my eye for color as well as my eye for detail. I was also expected to find colors that would work well in specific design schemes. My professional writing and conversing skills improved thanks to the many emails I composed and my daily interactions with professionals in the design field. I saw first hand how much more could be accomplished when a team works
together and for each other. Interning for a company as united as Cullman and Kravis will always remind me that cooperation and collaboration are vital in any group endeavor.

I learned a great deal from the women at Cullman and Kravis. From the very beginning, they entrusted me with responsibilities that seemed trivial at the time but slowly I began to realize that nothing about this business is trivial. Before my internship I had an idea about interior design that I found to be far from the truth. I thought being an interior designer meant choosing fabrics for pillows and shades for lamps. However, after just one day with Cullman and Kravis I witnessed the enormous effort and passion that goes into designing a beautiful home. The designers would work with architects to perfect floor plans, coordinate with custom carpet makers to create the ideal rug and even sketch by hand furniture that was conceptualized by the client.

This summer I realized how important it is for me to pursue a career that allows me to be creative on a daily basis. I became aware of how much I enjoyed working and collaborating with others, which has helped me to narrow down my prospective career choices. Most importantly, I gained confidence in myself and I cannot thank Sewanee enough for making this experience possible.