Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

Established in 1952, Southern Lit Alliance is an organization dedicated to supporting literature and writing throughout the Chattanooga area. They are engaged in a variety of important community outreach programs, such as sponsoring an annual writing contest for local students in kindergarten through twelfth grade, providing reading and discussion opportunities for incarcerated men and women in the Bradley County Jail, offering a six-week summer poetry workshop for local teens, and hosting a public literary conference, SouthWord, featuring members of the Fellowship of Southern Writers.

As Southern Lit Alliance’s programs and marketing intern, it was my job to create and distribute copy and promotional material for the organization. I managed their Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts; I wrote a weekly blog reviewing books that had won awards from the Fellowship of Southern Writers; I wrote emails and a newsletter to our patrons and other parties who might be interested in our events; I wrote thank you letters to our donors; and I even got to write a press release for an upcoming reading and send it to over fifty media outlets. I also completed a variety of small, office tasks such as stuffing envelopes and keeping the organization's mailing list up-to-date.
During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

Throughout my time with Southern Lit Alliance (So Lit), I acquired a variety of important skills. From a purely practical standpoint, I learned a lot about writing for business. While I had previously considered my academic and creative writing skills quite strong, my internship with Southern Lit Alliance taught me how to write in a very specific, informative yet succinct, style appropriate for press releases, promotional blog and social media posts, and business emails. Moreover, I learned to perceive and mimic the subtle differences between the highly formal tone used in press releases and business emails and the slightly more informal and conversational, yet still professional, tone used in blog posts, social media posts, and other kinds of content designed to connect emotionally with an audience. These new skills allowed me to help Southern Lit Alliance spread its message with a wider audience. In fact, my supervisor actually described one thank you letter that I wrote to our donors as "better than anything [she] ever could have written”.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

I was charged with making hotel reservations for our SouthWord guests, which required a great deal of patience and quick thinking. As I quickly discovered, most local hotels were sold out for the weekend of SouthWord due to the Head of the Hooch rowing regatta. However, the skills I acquired at Sewanee, such as clear, effective communication and creative, outside-the-box thinking, allowed me to ultimately find a solution to this issue: booking smaller blocks of rooms in multiple hotels.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

Although I have always considered writing a very personal process, at So Lit, I learned to respond to constructive criticism of my writing so that I could effectively communicate the organization's message. Once, my supervisor asked me to draft and redraft a newsletter several times, which was somewhat frustrating, but I understood that she was only criticizing my newsletter because she wanted my work to communicate So Lit's message as clearly and effectively as possible. Learning to respond to constructive criticism is an essential skill when working in any kind of team environment.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

My time with Southern Lit Alliance has greatly informed my career goals and plans. Although I have always felt that my communication and writing skills are the strongest asset I have to offer a future employer, I have often wondered if these skills are truly necessary in the workplace. However, after interning for So Lit, I am convinced of the need for strong communication skills, both verbal and written, in a corporate environment. Throughout my time with the organization, both my supervisors and I were constantly communicating: writing emails, posting to our official social media accounts, making phone calls, and attending meetings. Because I felt comfortable and confident performing these tasks, I now feel much more confident in my plans to pursue a position in communications. Finally, this internship has convinced me that whatever I do, I must have an interest in the goals and values of the organization for which I work. Literature and education, especially the education of children, are topics about which I am extremely passionate. I fully believe that I was able to read and review eight works of literature in ten weeks with little difficulty because I love reading and am passionate about sharing that love with others. This passion for literature informed everything I did with So Lit, making me work harder because I wanted to help this organization that had inspired me as a child. I want to have a similar experience in whatever career I ultimately dedicate myself; thus, passion is key.
In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

As the youngest person in the office, I quickly realized that my older coworkers had different life experiences and viewpoints than I did. However, I found that being genuinely curious, asking them questions, and actually listening to their answers helped us to understand each other and ultimately work together better.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

Words alone cannot express how deeply and sincerely grateful I am. This internship was enormously valuable, teaching me many of the practical skills I will need in order to pursue a career in communications, and I would not have been able to take advantage of this opportunity without your support. Thank you so much!