

This summer I had the incredible opportunity to intern for the World Wildlife Fund for Nature at their headquarters in Washington, DC. The World Wildlife Fund for Nature (otherwise known as WWF) is an international, non-governmental organization that operates in over 100 countries. Their mission is to preserve our planet's natural resources while promoting balance between people and nature, both locally and globally.

My internship with the WWF was within the organization's department for Science & Innovation. I worked as a moderator for an internal communications website called the Learning Exchange for Network Science (LENS), a virtual community used to build capacity between WWF scientists around the world. The website featured an array of scientific "communities" used to connect international WWF scientists with similar interests, often used for sharing data, resources, and discussions. Other website features included a "resources" tab which provided LENS members with the most recent funding opportunities, learning opportunities, and peer-reviewed research publications relevant to WWF's larger mission of conservation. Although the LENS website had a lot of valuable capacity-building potential, there were still a few hurdles to cross before it could be widely used throughout the WWF international science community.

During my internship with WWF, the LENS website was still in its initial stages of launch. This meant that although LENS had the potential to be an incredible virtual networking tool, there was only a small fraction of WWF scientists who had joined the website, and an even smaller portion who were active participants on it. Because of this, encouraging membership and active participation became some of my main duties during the internship.

To encourage members to revisit the site regularly, I searched for and uploaded interesting and relevant content to the site on a daily—even hourly—basis. I then sent out weekly “Literature Digest” and “Announcements” emails, which previewed the new uploaded content in an organized, visually appealing manner, supported by an online campaign-design tool called Mail Chimp. In addition to the weekly email campaigns, I sent out a biweekly “Update” email, which featured photos of new LENS members and various articles from the website. Designing these virtual campaigns proved to be one of my favorite parts of the internship! I loved scouring the Internet for the most recent breakthroughs in conservation biology, and then formatting the information into the Mail Chimp design templates. The freedom that I had in choosing the photos, colors, layout, and even basic content of the campaigns was liberating. I was lucky to have an internship that granted me with a high degree of autonomy, and that allowed me to ooze some creative juices in the process.

This autonomy did, at first, present some challenges. Holding a minor in biology, I was —justifiably— expected to be familiar with conservation science and the work that WWF does therein. The problem was that I had studied human cellular and molecular biology, not conservation biology. This meant that from day one of my internship, I was learning. I had to triple check the meanings of conservation terms before I published anything to the website, and I always did a bit of additional research on subjects before I deemed them “relevant” to WWF’s mission and therefore worthy of being uploaded to LENS. The knowledge gap became more apparent when I was tasked with stimulating

intellectual discussions and activity within the LENS communities. I thought to myself, *how am I, a conservation novice, supposed to start an intellectually engaging discussion with EXPERTS?* The answer was through more reading and research. Undoubtedly, I still started a few discussions that were obviously not stimulating enough, as seen through the lack of responses on the scientists' behalf. I learned from these instances, and eventually created a few successful discussions by the end of the internship.

Aside from my specific intern duties, working in the WWF building itself was a very enriching experience. On a typical workday, there were almost always 1-3 'brown bag' events to attend, where a specialist would give a talk or presentation over lunch. I attended many brown bags, which exposed me to a variety of WWF issues that were interesting and unrelated to my department of Science & Innovation.

More than anything, this internship was a personal learning experience for me. Aside from the actual knowledge that I've gained concerning conservation science, I've also learned that I do not wish to pursue a 'desk job', and that I would be happiest with a career that allows me to be active, social, autonomous and creative. I've also discovered a lot about the city of Washington, which is a great place to be for any young professional. A few general takeaways that I've gathered from this experience: If you want to work for a non-profit, you have to believe in its mission **wholeheartedly**; if you don't know something, don't act like you do; always continue to learn and grow within your field; and don't ever make excuses—make solutions.

I am extremely grateful to Sewanee and to WWF for giving me this amazing opportunity, and I wish the next intern all the best in his/her endeavors.