

I spent the summer as the marketing intern at Montana Community Development Corporation (Montana CDC) in Missoula, Montana. Montana CDC is a nonprofit organization that provides loans and consulting for small business owners. Montana CDC's loan clients are people who do not qualify for bank financing, and need loans to start, expand, or maintain their small business. Montana CDC is a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) that focuses on small business development, but there are other types of CDFIs, some that focus on housing, or personal financial services. As a CDFI, Montana CDC's main goal is to promote the financial stability of low-income communities, which creates jobs and promotes the overall health of those communities.

As the marketing intern, I helped write and edit content for Montana CDC's marketing materials and communications, including social media and Montana CDC's website. I also assisted with the distribution of press releases, including following up with media contacts. Toward the end of the summer, Montana CDC's director of marketing moved to a different position within the organization and a new employee was hired. My last major project was assisting with the transition and helping to train the new marketing manager. My responsibilities also included photo editing and minor graphic design work for various marketing materials.

When I started my internship had nearly no understanding of what Montana CDC did or how they provided training and loans to business owners in Montana. As the marketing intern, it was important that I learn more about the particular ways Montana CDC helped their clients so I could in turn tell those stories and provide meaningful insight for the public into what Montana CDC could do for individuals and communities.

As an English major/Philosophy minor with no background in finance, educating myself on the world of CDFIs became a project that I saw as being critical to my success. My first few weeks I went to a lot of meetings where I felt lost. They weren't strictly (or even loosely) related to marketing, but observing the day-to-day operation of the organization helped me understand the subtleties of the loan process that in turn informed my writing. I was able to write information to many different audiences once I understood how Montana CDC worked with its clients, banks, and government organizations.

This summer was the first time I saw the potential value of my writing skills in the workforce. I often wrote in collaboration with others, which I initially found a little nerve wracking. It reminded me of being called into a professor's office freshman year to discuss a paper; I thought that the only possible outcome was that people would point out what I was doing incorrectly. As it turns out, I felt like I was on much more equal footing than I had ever felt in an academic setting. It was about finding the right way to say something for the group, and the company, not about criticizing what didn't work. The experience made me feel much more confident in my ability to contribute meaningfully to a professional group. Even though I'm only 21 and still in college the President of the organization would ask me my opinion on how to phrase things, and even though it was sometimes as minor as punctuation, writing is still something I can look to and own as a special skill.

While I'm still not close to sure about what I want to do with the rest of my life, this summer did give me practical experience in an office and a sense of what my skills are. I think the knowledge of how I can practically contribute to a group right now makes me much more comfortable with looking into fields I previously would have shied

away from out of fear of failure. I also realized that while I probably won't find a job right out of college that I completely understand how to do correctly from the get-go, as long as I ask questions and stay open to criticism about my work, I'll be able to learn how to be successful. I feel fortunate that I've had a college experience that was rich with different kinds of academic and extra-curricular challenges that have helped me develop critical thinking skills, and that this summer I was able to apply those skills and actively learn the value of being able to think and express ideas clearly.