

Mercer Capital Internship Review

My summer at Mercer Capital proved to be a unique and rewarding experience on a variety of levels. The skills acquired and relationships fostered made me appreciate the value of both the education Sewanee offers as well as the importance of meaningful outside experience. To give some background, Mercer Capital was not my first finance internship; I have held several internships within the financial services industry since my freshman year summer. The value that translated from prior experiences to Mercer manifested itself in work ethic, detail orientation and experience working with excel and Bloomberg. These skills were instrumental in my success while at Mercer and I would encourage future candidates to consider gaining familiarity with these skills in order to maximize your personal experience and your value-adding potential once there.

Overview

Mercer Capital is a very small firm, even when considering it a boutique, with about 50 people spread between Memphis, Nashville and Louisville. The heart of the organization falls in the practice of valuation while the workflow and revenue is generated by the applications of valuation principles such as M&A and succession planning. These applications vary broadly from Litigation issues to financial statement reporting and regulatory compliance. Mercer focuses on small and mid-cap clients with a vast majority being privately held. As such, the organization was based around a loose understanding of industry and service groups, junior analysts were staffed as generalists and industry specialization was gained with seniority. Interns are staffed within service groups where they are expected assist with any ongoing projects or client calls and attend weekly meetings for client staffing. The majority of my responsibilities with the bank group were

to do math checks on reports by 'tick-and-tying' analyst calculations and references back to their sources within the company's financial statements. This process, usually delegated to analysts, was incredibly useful in understanding how Mercer's final products (valuation reports) are created. I was able to familiarize myself with several widely used models such as DCF while also learning about models developed within the firm. However, the bulk of my time was spent on an intern project where we were tasked with analyzing the past 5 years of client work comparing that to both how the firm and its competitors present themselves through marketing efforts to effectively redesign Mercer's industry coverage to more effectively allocate efforts in thought leadership and marketing. I created an automated client database and quantitative tool to help maximize billing practices pointing out areas of efficiency and inefficiency within the firm. The findings of the project culminated in a 45 minute presentation at the annual meeting in late July and specialized industry research portals that I designed in Visual Basic. In tandem with this project, I was staffed on the medical device quarterly analysis where I worked with a vice president to redesign their analysis methodology and wrote a published article eventually put out on Mercer's site.

Skills Acquired and Impact

There were several different types of skills I developed while at Mercer. I became very adept with financial software such as Bloomberg and SNL, utilizing both tools for several hours a day. Within weeks of starting, I was being asked to develop specialized launch pads for industry coverage and became one of the resident specialists on the Bloomberg terminal. Moreover, I received basic training in some valuations principles and investment banking skills such as creating comparables sheets, working within DCFs, creating company spreads and other financial calculations. Unlike some intern programs,

Mercer did not have any set intern-training program; rather, we were expected to acquire many of these skills on the job. This trial-by-fire methodology required me to be proactive in asking questions and working closely with the full time analysts. While challenging, the method gave me perspective into the real world application of finance skills learned at Sewanee.

Beyond the fundamentals and technicals, I gained valuable experience in working with a group. The other interns and I were often staffed on the same, or very similar, projects, so we came to lean on each other heavily for information. The experience gave me a new understanding in how I can contribute towards a group by capitalizing on my strengths while recognizing and building on my weaknesses. Moreover, the addition of deliverable dates for projects helped create an environment where we had to prioritize our work and be efficient in producing a quality final product, sometimes in less than a day. With that said, by the end of the summer, we were churning out projects with incredible speed.

Overall, the internship with Mercer Capital was incredibly rewarding to me. There were countless 'high points' to the summer such as my presentation at the annual meeting, the medical device newsletter and the relationships built with my coworkers. This culminated in being viewed as an equal in the eyes of my coworkers, which I saw as the most rewarding of all. The experience solidified, in my mind, the intention of pursuing a career in financial services. The internship emphasized the importance of being a strong skill set to the workplace, being a self-starter, capitalizing on any opportunities by never saying "no" and learning how to open as many doors as possible.