Summer check-in: MBA internships

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Alba Cordover, Kate Gleason and Ray Howze are pursuing MBA summer internships in fields from analytics to fashion.

Kate Gleason needed an MBA summer internship. She persisted through four rounds of interviews at FGS Global, a strategic communications firm. She passed a writing test. She waited for news for a month and a half.

She got the job.

“I was super, super excited,” Gleason said.

But FGS Global has offices across the United States. Gleason dreamed of working in New York, but the firm could send her anywhere.

“When they finally told me that I got the New York office I was over the moon,” she said.

Now at her dream job, in a city she’s always wanted to live, Gleason has thrown herself into the work. And her MBA classmates from the Freeman School of Business

are doing the same: determined to succeed in fields from fashion to analytics, reporting to work from suburban New Orleans to Paris.

Carla Coury, director of operations at Freeman's Career Management Center, said recruiting starts as soon as students enroll in the MBA program. The internships are critical to students' success.

"They need to be ready to hit the ground running," Coury said.

And the internships are important: Coury said nearly half of the roles become jobs.

Most students seek an MBA internship between their first and second years of the program. A summer internship pushes students to practice skills they've learned in their first year of the MBA program. It expands their network and allows them to test new career paths. And it teaches them new skills they will bring to Freeman in the fall.

Kate Gleason, FGS Global

Gleason chose to earn her MBA because she wanted a career switch. She worked in the arts and nonprofits in her early 20s, but during her first few weeks at Freeman, she took a career aptitude test that said she was a perfect fit for public relations. That inspired her to pursue an internship at a company called Sard Verbinnen, which has since rebranded as FGS Global.

So far, much of her work consists of on-the-job training. A mentor at the company guides her through the internship and loops her in with clients. Gleason also writes press release drafts and practices public speaking – skills she said her first year of MBA courses taught her well.

“We have a few projects where we're going to be presenting in front of a ton of people,” Gleason said. “That's something I do all the time at the Freeman School, so I’ve had some practice.”

Gleason’s knowledge of business also proves crucial. FGS Global’s New York office focuses on financial communication and caters to clients in the city’s financial world. An introduction to finance class Gleason took her first semester helped her understand that world, and her MBA motivates her to stay up to date on business news.

She’s getting a course in business confidentiality too: the internship requires her to maintain the trust of the firm’s top-secret clients.

Gleason works on projects with a cohort of other interns, but she’s also tasked with an individual project: studying equity, diversity and inclusion as it relates to the Country Music Awards.

She said the best part of the internship is “being able to listen and learn.” Her experience at FGS Global has been so impactful she hopes to work there after she graduates.

“I've interned and worked now at so many different companies of varying sizes, and company culture is such a big deal to me,” Gleason said. “I can tell they really care about their employees.”

Ray Howze, Laitram

Ray Howze does not sit in a cubicle all day. His MBA summer internship focuses on problem-solving. It’s a highly regarded role in a dynamic and social workplace.

He works for a company that makes stairs. And so far, he loves it.

“I know it sounds weird. It’s stairs, how interesting can that be?” he said. “It’s kind of one of those businesses where somebody's got to do it.”

The company, Laitram, is an innovative manufacturer based in the New Orleans area. Their designs include a shrimp peeling machine and an all-plastic, modular construction conveyor belt. Howze works in the company’s Lapeyre stairs division, home to the alternating tread stairs invention, a design used for safety on oil rigs that has gained worldwide success.

Howze focuses on analytics and helps the company identify where it can save money.

“If you think of a back stairwell at a stadium, or an apartment building, they do a lot of those,” he said. “So, if you're using some kind of material that's more expensive than another, it can get expensive, fast.”

He’s using the statistics, accounting and finance skills he learned in his first year of the MBA program on the job.

“It’s beneficial to have a real-life application of some of these things you cover in the classroom,” he said.

Howze’s background is in journalism, and he came to Freeman seeking a career shift. He hopes his communications skills can combine with new business knowledge to propel him to success in analytics. He isn’t sure he’ll stick with stairs his whole life. But the lessons he’s learning in his MBA summer internship are a good introduction to the field.

“What I'm learning now, as it applies to stairs, could be something that applies to any other manufacturing company,” he said.

Alba Cordover, Burberry

Alba Cordover fills out a lot of spreadsheets. She sends invoices and attends zoom meetings. Her summer internship seems like standard corporate work.

But Cordover works at Burberry, a British luxury fashion brand.

That’s no small name in fashion circles. It’s the Burberry of the iconic trench coat and distinct checker print. The Burberry that graces runways in Milan, London and Paris. The one seen on Madonna. And Elton John. Sometimes Kate Middleton.

But Cordover knows there’s hard work behind the prestige.

“A lot of it isn’t super glamorous,” she said. “But there are parts that are glamorous which makes it worth it.”

Cordover works in Burberry’s client engagement department and coordinates with the brand’s European storefronts. She speaks French – and says the experience

would be impossible without it – but many of the meetings she attends are collaborations with Burberry offices across Europe, so the common language is English. She said much of the job centers around managing people.

“You need to know how to manage professional relationships,” Cordover said. “It’s not solitary work.”

Sometimes that work is as simple as submitting invoices to accountants. Other days she previews samples of the brand’s newest clothing collections or attends Burberry events with elite clients.

But the glamour of the company and the romanticized idea of Paris doesn’t mean her summer internship is easy.

“I’m learning a lot about what it’s like to work for a large brand,” Cordover said.

Cordover isn’t sure she wants to stay in Paris forever, but she wants to keep working in corporate fashion, and her international experience will prepare her for future careers anywhere.

“It’s really cool to have this background,” she said. “Now that I actually have the corporate career experience and actually working and living in a country rather than just going to school there or rather than just going on vacation, I feel like it's invaluable.”