Interview with Leadership Walton Student Kristen Howell

Sara: Hello, thank you for joining us for this edition of CareerCast brought to you by the Sam M. Walton College of Business Career Center. I’m Sara Yell and our topic today is the CRCC Asia Internship Program. I am joined today by Kristen Howell, a member of Leadership Walton who participated in the internship program this summer in Beijing, China. Hi Kristen, thank you for speaking with me today. Can you tell the listeners a little about yourself?

Kristen: My name is Kristen Howell. I am a junior, accounting major, and econ management minor. I’m involved in Leadership Walton. I’m a Walton College ambassador. I am a project leader of SIFE, and I went to China this past summer.

Sara: What type of internship did you complete through the CRCC Asia program?

Kristen: I did an accounting internship with Tung Chung Tax Consulting Agency; and basically they are a pretty small company, and so I didn’t really do a whole lot of accounting. They kind of really wanted me to learn about the entire company as a whole. So, for them I did a lot of proofreading for them, English proofread documents. Because it’s very important for them to make sure they have clear concise English documents for those international companies they are working with, because it makes them look a lot better when they look like they know what they are doing as far as English is concerned, and I also met with department heads on a regular basis. They wanted me to get to know a lot about their company as a whole, and they also wanted to exchange the differences and similarities between business in China versus business in the States; and this is going to sound cheesy, but, actually a lot of the business core classes kind of helped me out with that, giving me that good foundation to be able to relate and to talk to them about business aspects of China and the United States.

Sara: Was this your first time to travel or study abroad?

Kristen: It was, for the most part. I went to Mexico with my family for vacations when I was little, but this was my first time, by myself, going out of the country. I knew two words in Chinese. I knew “hello” and “thank you”. But CRCC did a really good job of making sure that I was completely covered. They got my visa for me, they got that all taken care of. They had someone waiting at the airport for me when I got there, and took me to where I was staying for the month, and they were really accommodating and made sure I was comfortable as soon as I got there.

Sara: What was the best part about living and working in Beijing?

Kristen: The best part about living in Beijing would have to be how cheap it was. It was so inexpensive. I could get a meal for the equivalent of 50 cents over there, and I lived off of dumplings and vegetables and duck. Everything in the shopping was so inexpensive. Going to the silk market and being able to buy those cheap knock offs for nothing. So that was a lot of fun. The best part about working in Beijing was just learning the little differences between work life in China versus work life in the States. So, I guess a normal lunch break would be about 45 minutes in the States. But in China I went to lunch, it was a big to do: I went with all of my
coworkers. We took about an hour and a half. We got back and then a lot of them would take a nap, and it was just like nap time after lunch. And then, by 3:00 everyone was laughing and talking about the latest videos they found on the internet. Then on Fridays, they actually cut out the entire afternoon to do what my mentor called a language exchange. Which basically, I would help them improve their English and they would help me learn basic Mandarin to help me get around and everything. That was a lot of fun.

Sara: What was the hardest part about living and working in Beijing?

Kristen: Initially the hardest part is getting around, because the characters are so foreign, and so they are just not what I’m used to at all. So that was hard at first. And the culture shock you have to go through when you first get there, because I think you do have to get through that before you can kind of move on. That was a little bit difficult, but living with the interns and having that English speaking mentor that worked with me in Tung Chung really helped me to acclimate well to China.

Sara: Do you have any advice to share with other students interested in the program?

Kristen: My best advice would just be to soak everything in. I am a very picky eater, I remember, and I tried anything and everything that they served me when I was over there. And to experience everything there is. You work 9:00 – 5:00, five days a week, so you’re tired after work obviously. So you need to make sure you take those weekends and go places. There’s so much to do in China, not even just Beijing, and I don’t even think that I got to see all that China had to offer. So use every second that you have to really soak in as much as you can.

Sara: Thank you Kristen. The Walton College Career Center is proud to have you represent Leadership Walton through this exciting internship program. Listeners, you can learn more about Leadership Walton and the CRCC Asia Internship Program online at WaltonCollege.uark.edu/Career. Thank you for listening today and please tune in for the next exciting installment of CareerCast.