From the Basement: Accounting Experience and Cultural Connection

By Jessica Marshall – Sealaska Summer 2020 Accounting Intern

Jessica Marshall, accounting intern, in her home office.

Applying to an internship in Alaska as a Wisconsin student with a family made me wonder how it would even work. I was born in Sitka, Alaska, but grew up in Wisconsin. Before attending my grandfather's memorial service in 2018, I had not been to Alaska since I was eight years old. I grew up knowing something was missing, and my trip to Alaska made me long to be closer to my family and learn more about my Tlingit heritage. This was more than a professional opportunity; it was a chance to find out more about myself.

Being offered the internship was exciting, but I was nervous. A month later, COVID-19 added fears of traveling and finding housing in a cautious community, which made me sure this internship was not happening. Receiving the news that the internship would be remote was a relief, like a weight off my shoulders.

Still, I worried it was not the experience I had hoped for; however, Sealaska exceeded my expectations during this remote internship, technically taking place in my basement office

(see photo). I was welcomed to the accounting team with a virtual meeting, had a virtual lunch for my birthday, and took an awesome virtual tour of the Juneau office, given to me by my intern “buddy,” Assistant Controller McKenzie Knudson, who as a fellow Wisconsinite made me feel right at home.

I have gained so much insight into the accounting world with a general overview of the whole department. I have gained confidence in the foundation that my education has created for me and built on it through daily tasks and projects such as preparing subsidiary accounting transactions, accounts payable, budget review and analysis, completing other monthly reconciliations, and gaining experience with the accounting software. During my downtime, as suggested by the intern team, I advanced my Excel skills through an online class by Coursera. I have also improved my communication and time management skills, which is necessary when working remotely.

Besides developing my technical skills, I was able to connect to my heritage and values. I learned of the history and culture of my people through virtual lectures by Sealaska Heritage Institute President Rosita Worl. I cultivated a better understanding and appreciation for art in an "Introduction to Formline" by Tlingit artist Robert Mills. After “lunch and learn” events with Chief Executive Officer Anthony Mallott and Chief Operating Officer Terry Downes, I was proud to be learning from a company so passionate about their values and the company’s mission. Guided by these values, I found a safe way to participate in “Give Back Day” to strengthen my community by making masks for the Hunger Task Force volunteers.

This was a valuable experience beyond a regular internship, even if it is just from my basement. I am glad I applied and grateful for the opportunity. I hope every person with the opportunity applies and gets as much out of it as I did.

A Day in the Life of an Environmental Field Intern Working from Home

By Matthew Smeltzer, Sealaska 2020 Environmental Technician Intern

Socially distant field trip — observing groundwater sampling in action

To start this blog post, I will give you a little background on myself. My name is Matthew Smeltzer; I'm 19 years old, born and raised in Western Washington. I've always loved the outdoors around here — playing sports, hiking and spending time on Lake Tapps for as long as I can remember. I decided to go to Montana State University in Bozeman to chase that outdoor rush a little more. I'm currently studying snow science there, which is what led me to this internship as an environmental technician.

The parallels between snow science and the work that Sealaska is doing out of the Sealaska Environmental Services (SES) Poulsbo office are striking. These similarities include testing, mapping, organizing data, and many others, so that's been amazing just from the standpoint of an aspiring scientist.

As for my day in the life, this internship has obviously been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the intern team has been nothing but accommodating through it all. The original plan was to be outdoors in a bit more "hands-on" environment, but that's a little more challenging now. Instead, I wake up at 7 a.m., grab some coffee, and sit down at my laptop for the day (choosing my hours has been a nice perk). I'll start the day off checking email and getting back to whoever needs me, and usually there's an invitation to some sort of seminar. These seminars have been a staple of the at-home internship, coming from either the intern team or my manager Andy Lewis. The seminars from the intern team are

often related to Southeast Alaska Native culture, ranging anywhere from an introductory formline class to historical analyses on coastal tribes. These seminars have brought me closer to my culture over the weeks of this internship.

The seminars from Andy Lewis pertain more to the career aspect of the internship, focusing on methods for groundwater sampling and treatment that I never even knew about before this experience. I can honestly say that I feel confident going into higher levels of education with what essentially feels like a head start. Plus, I have earned some certifications through various trainings to add to my resume: Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Removal, Construction, First Aid, and others. All of these I've been able to take at my leisure and really absorb the material. Hopefully with them being done now, it should make the onboarding process for future fieldwork a little easier.

Working together with the training, various members of the environmental team from Poulsbo have been sending me project plans. These plans have proven very valuable to me because I'm able to compare firsthand what I've learned in training and seminars to these real-world projects.

All in all, this internship has been phenomenal. Even though the current conditions are unfortunate, the career and educational growth occurring right from my home office has been amazing.

Aaní Perkins workstation

SHI Education Intern Works with Language Revitalization

By Aaní Perkins, Sealaska Heritage Institute 2020 Education Intern

COVID-19 has created an exhausting year, filling many of our lives with tremendous uncertainty and yet unanswered questions. For some, it's put a pause on things for the foreseeable future. And while the pandemic has slowed things down quite a bit, I've appreciated all the time I've had to consider some pretty big questions: What do I love to do? Am I on the right path for me? What do I need to do to achieve my goals? What *are* my goals?

Coming into this internship, these questions were already on my mind, but these past six weeks have given me a bit of much-needed clarity. As such, completing this internship from the comfort of my home community in *Sheet'ká* (Sitka, Alaska) turned out to be possibly the best thing to come out of quarantine. Spending time on the land here, I'm just beginning to find the answers.

To be honest, I had no idea what I'd be doing in this internship, so the reality of my job was beyond anything I imagined. Most of my work this summer has been with Southeast Alaska Indigenous languages. Coming from a background of learning *Lingít* language, along with the linguistics experience I garnered in my first year of college, it's truly been the perfect fit. I've worked on tasks ranging from supporting the *Haa Yoo X'atángi Deiyí* (Our Language Pathway) grant, to translating audio recordings of *Sm'algyax* (Tsimshian language). In all of this, I've gotten a taste of the grand possibilities of language revitalization work at Sealaska Heritage Institute.

Which brings me back to those questions: What *am* I meant to do? For me, this isn't easy to answer. I doubt myself constantly; I don't know if I'm the right person to teach language, or if I have the strength for difficult community-based work. Sometimes I think I should leave it to the experts and go on my way. As a rising sophomore in college, I realize I have plenty of

time to figure it all out. But if there's one thing this summer has taught me, it's that Indigenous peoples and the work we do to build and sustain community are precious. Finding your place takes time, but it's the people and relationships you find that make it worthwhile.

The people at Sealaska Heritage Institute have been described to me as a family, and I've found that to be true. I've been met with the utmost kindness and warmth in this internship, and it has impressed upon me that there is nothing more valuable than community. The deep appreciation the employees have for each other has inspired me to commit myself to community-building throughout my career and my life.

Information Technology Intern Works on a Firewall from Home

By Olivia Jarman, Sealaska 2020 IT intern

Olivia Jarman with a firewall

When I applied for the Sealaska internship program in the fall, I was excited by the opportunity and knew it would be a pivotal moment in my education and career. I expected to learn a lot during the interim of my internship, but I did not realize at the time how formative this experience would truly be for my career path and goals.

Currently, I am a senior at Central Washington University, majoring in information technology. When news started to come out about the COVID-19 pandemic, I was concerned that perhaps the internship would be delayed or not happen at all. I was impressed by the intern and IT team's efforts at Sealaska to ensure that the internships would go on this summer. One of my goals since I have studied IT has been the chance to work remotely, so with the internship's transition to remote work, I was able to experience working remotely.

Working remotely was not met without challenges. One of my projects this summer was to replace the main firewall at the Seattle office. A firewall helps protect a network from unauthorized access and traffic. First, I was sent a test firewall to practice and work on to become familiar with the type of firewall I would configure. I have not worked much on firewalls in school, so many of the tasks I performed were completely new to me. I learned quickly; the communication between team members was excellent, and I was able to reach out to team members and receive feedback promptly.

Other experiences during my internship have helped shape my interests and goals. Before my internship, I knew I was interested in networks and wanted to learn more about them. One of my other projects has been working on a diagram that shows the different switches in one of the offices and their specific connections and configuration settings. I found this an especially fun project and was fascinated by their structure and how these devices are interconnected. This project highlighted how much I enjoy working on networks, and although at times challenging, it is something I plan to continue to practice and work on.

As my internship comes to an end, and I reflect on the tasks and projects that I have done, I am very grateful for this opportunity that I was given. I am proud to have been an intern for a company that is so deeply connected to my personal beliefs and culture. I had the chance to apply skills that I have learned in school, and learn and practice new skills that I have not been taught yet in my courses. I also was able to determine what direction I want to go into my career regarding information technology during this experience. I know the lessons learned and the knowledge I was taught will stay with me for the remainder of my career.