Van Bui, UC Irvine, Thammasat University, Thailand

Van interned with People Serving People Foundation (PSPF) while she was studying abroad in Thailand. PSPF serves urban refugees through legal, translation, and financial support. Van is a double major in Public Health Policy and Asian American Studies and she chose this internship to give her experience in working closely with a specific community, as well as providing her with a perspective on the nuances among the Southeast Asian diaspora. Van worked in social media development and curated a social media plan to increase traffic on the PSPF social media account and the CHAMALiiN social media account, which is a project that provides sustainable and ethical financial opportunities for refugees. Van also organized a donation drive to collect good form exchange students who were returning to the US and the good were then distributed into the refugee community.

Van had several personal and professional goals during her internship. “From the beginning, I knew I wanted to engage in meaningful work that fulfills both my personal values as a Vietnamese-American daughter of refugees and my professional values of how to integrate equity and community into my career. But as time passed, I realized that I wanted to learn and practice patience. All of the social issues that I want to fix have existed for so long, and my short 3 months of interning with PSPF wasn’t nearly enough time to significantly solve those issues.” As part of her professional growth, Van learned how to create a social media plan that was intentional and consistent, how to design and structure a website, how to engage and interact with communities, and how to listen, engage, and think critically about the needs of the people she is working with.

Tiffany Wang, UC San Diego, University of Canterbury, New Zealand

Tiffany selected the University of Canterbury as her study abroad destination in part because they offer an Enterprise in Practice course that would offer her an opportunity to intern abroad. Tiffany worked on a project to develop an augmented reality materials science app at the Human Interface Technology (HIT) Lab. The most challenging aspect of her internship was dealing with the steep learning curve in the workplace because she had never used the 3D modeling software or the real-time game engine being utilized for the project. Tiffany took the initiative to educate herself on the massive amount of background knowledge she needed to do the day-to-day work in her internship. “One new personal goal that came out of my internship at the HIT Lab NZ was my desire to learn how to code. Messing around with the different features in Unity made me realize how much more creative freedom I would have if I could come up with my own codes. I had never considered myself as tech savvy before, but when I pitched this AR app to my social innovation class at the University of Canterbury, the people I spoke to afterward
assumed that I knew what I was doing all along. In reality, I just spent a couple hours scouring the internet like a headless chicken to answer the latest of many technical problems I encounter.”

Although material science isn’t directly related to her Chemical Engineering major, Tiffany has developed ideas of ways in which to integrate augmented reality to some common situations that Chemical Engineers might face. In this way, the work she did at her internship will have a direct impact on her academics and her career. “Interning at the HIT Lab NZ has not only taught me technical skills necessary for a budding chemical engineer, but it also prepared me for future dynamic work environments by building my confidence in my ability to be a lifelong learner.”

Anne Park, UC San Diego, Yonsei University, Korea

As soon as Anne decided to study abroad, she knew she wanted to intern as part of her international experience. She also knew that she might be at a disadvantage, being an international undergraduate student, but she didn’t let this deter her from her goal of finding a meaningful internship abroad. She did her own research and located a technology start-up company based in Korea and started contacting their employees through LinkedIn. Through her tenacity, Anne was able to secure a position working on blockchain technology with Chain Partners Inc., which was a perfect opportunity for her to utilize her knowledge as a double major in mathematics and economics.

Anne was immediately enthralled with the work she was doing at Chain Partners and eventually was allowed to participate on not just her original blockchain project, but two additional projects as well. “I also ran into the issue of being overextended, due to being on three separate teams at the same time. I had to learn to communicate my workload and deadlines to my managers, which allowed me to adjust and plan out my project contributions in a way that would satisfy everyone. And lastly, though I was fluent in Korean, the language used in a business environment in Korea was quite different from what I was used to. This required me to be open about what I did not understand and ask for help when needed. Ultimately, the difficulties I encountered at my internship helped me grow to be a more communicative, independent, and proactive professional.” These transferrable skills have already been put to use in Anne’s future as she was able to secure a position with Deloitte Consulting while studying abroad in Korea.

Rena Li, UC Santa Barbara, Made in Italy, UC Center Florence, Italy

To explore a long-dismissed dream career in art & design, Rena interned with a sustainable café called Amblè - a cute, picturesque, casual eatery, tucked away in the rustic corners behind the Ponte Vecchio. When she joined Amblè, the business was in the process of redefining its image, and Rena quickly became a member of the team during this crucial point in its timeline. She helped conceptualize a new interactive website, brainstorm on new services, create illustrations that captured the company’s philosophy, and gave recommendations on how the company could stay loyal to their philosophy while
evolving to meet consumer demands. At the end, the team and her supervisor trusted her ideas and put her recommendations into action.

With little experience in the world of design, Rena came to the internship hoping that someone would guide her through the jargon and concepts of this industry, but most of the time she felt like a wanderer, grasping at any information she came across. The tasks she was given were daunting, but "knowing nothing" became her greatest motivator. She learned to appreciate the lack of direction, and excelled in the free-flowing and collaborative work environment at Amblè. For hours, she sat in bustling coffee shops, scouring the internet for books and articles on the principles of design, taught herself how to use Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator, and then combined her creative judgement with what she had learned about interface design.

For Rena, taking a quarter to live and work in Florence felt like stepping out of the rat race. At UCSB, she had studied economics and accounting, and while she knew that her studies provided a useful foundation for her future, she felt that she never truly produced work that fulfilled her. Her design internship solidified her desire to become a UX designer, and her work at Amblè kick-started an ever-growing race against herself to produce projects better than the last. Since her time in Florence, she’s been looking for work in non-profit organizations, and she conjured up her own projects to include in her design portfolio. “With the lessons I learned through my internship experience in Florence, I intend to pursue my career in design with curiosity, courage, and a 2-3 shots of espresso in my coffee.”

Irene Kwangaba, UC San Diego, University of Ghana

While studying at the University of Ghana, Irene Kwangaba interned at Echoing Hills Village, a non-profit organization that specializes in working with persons with disabilities so they not only have a home, but also are able to live purposeful lives with respect and dignity. Irene facilitated group activities focusing on wellness, physical education, reading and math skills. She initially came into her internship with the goal of better understanding occupational therapy through a cross-cultural lens but, over the course of the semester, that goal shifted to exploring the perceptions and stigma of disability in Ghana.

She tried to focus her efforts on getting to know the people—caregivers, staff members, and especially the residents of Echoing Hills. Her time there challenged her to confront her own biases and subconscious prejudices towards persons with disabilities as her interactions and relationships made the experiences of this
community very real to her. Through this internship, Irene gained patience and adaptability to uncomfortable or uncertain situations and she came to understand that “the tenacity and passion to truly help people reveal their potentials and achieve their greatest accomplishments regardless of the disability or impairment that they have is the very essence of occupational therapy”. She will carry this knowledge and these skills with her into her future career as an occupational therapist.