

Reflecting on Interning with NASPA

Course Learning Summer 2015

John Weng

San Diego State University

Author Note

John Weng is a second year Master's student in the Post Secondary Educational Leadership Program with a specialization in Student Affairs.

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### **Introduction**

Choosing an internship was one of the most daunting tasks during my first year. I still remember the chaos of managing ten interviews within a week, being prepared for each of those interviews, while still attending school and working as a graduate assistant. When it finally all came to an end, I knew I wanted to choose the experience that would provide me with a unique experience that I normally wouldn't receive. Between housing, orientation, and working at an association, the choice was clear: my summer would be spent at the NASPA office in Washington D.C.

Throughout the summer, I was able to experience a completely different side of higher education – through the association that has supported much of my professional development. As an intern in a brand new work environment, and brand new city, this opportunity truly challenged my practices as a leader, my ability to communicate ideas and concepts effectively, and the task of working with diverse members in a setting where I was just starting (PLO 2, 7, 8). Further, this process helped me better understand where I stand in work-life integration (Personal Goal 1) and helped me understand my personality as a professional. The learning occurred the most through my planning for the Careers in Student Affairs Month Initiative, where I served as a point of contact and worked with a staff of interns and other full time staff in the NASPA office.

### **Links to Program Learning Outcomes**

As the Graduate Intern, one of principal responsibilities involved the planning for Careers in Student Affairs Month for the current year. Through this process, I worked with a team of interns who come from different backgrounds, educational experiences, countries, and professional interests. I faced a challenge of making Student Affairs interesting to interns who

were in the accounting area or the computer science area. Further, while I advised them, I was not a direct supervisor. This made establishing an advisory relationship between us a particularly interesting challenge, as my supervisors expected me to lead without putting me into a position of leadership. I found myself establishing rapport, and leading by example. I made sure the students could witness my work ethic and doing of any grunt work needed, so that they understood that I was willing to work hard and not give them boring tasks. I took time to develop relationships with each of them and understand what they were looking to get out of the internship. I then creatively framed tasks in ways such that I could make it interesting for the interns. For example, I emphasized the current importance of marketing on résumés and encouraged an intern who was interested in public policy to consider how she might market a campaign as she worked on marketing tasks for Careers in Student Affairs Month.

### **Links to Personal and Professional Goals**

Through working at an association, I experienced what it was like to have stable job hours. In doing so, I was able to better find my balance of work-life balance and identifying work-life integration as a more appropriate phrase to describe my work ethic. I found myself responding to emails that would come up when it was urgent, but not minding them because I understood that my help for a conference that was currently going on would support the attendees and their professional development. When I understood the impact of my work, I realized that this was no different from the work I do on a campus, and that sometimes work might overlap into my personal life. Thankfully, my work environment was forgiving and supportive of my personal and professional development.

As a professional, this opportunity allowed me to better learn my personality as a professional in the office. While the interns sought to enjoy themselves and spend time outside the office with each other, this behavior helped me realize that I also value autonomy and the

freedom to spend time doing things as an individual. Further, while I always thought of myself as someone who cared about becoming friends with my coworkers, this experience helped me realize me that I actually prefer having some level of separation so that I can spend some time away from them.

### **Conclusion**

I was originally excited about the opportunity to try working in higher education in a different setting and spend a summer away from a city that has become my home. Little did I expect that the opportunity would expand my professional network and learn a tremendous amount of my working style. This internship allowed me to discover things about myself that I thought I already knew. For example, while I always thought of myself as someone who would stay on campus and work as a professional, after this experience, I realized that I enjoyed the dynamic nature of work outside of a campus and working with multiple people at once. This opened the door to other experiences, such as consulting within higher education.