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Roni Lifeworks Intern

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COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT




Internship Title: Scanner Specialist I

Organization Worked For: Roni LifeWorks

Student Name: Anthony Ortiz

Internship Dates: 7/9/24 8/25/24

Faculty Advisor Name: Ed Weber

Department: ESCI 

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STUDENT SIGNATURE Anthony Ortiz

DATE: 8/31/24

Over this summer term, I had the opportunity to intern with Roni Lifeworks partnered alongside the Seattle Department Of Health to collaborate on a 5 year long project. The project is currently in its 3rd year, therefore much of the project is still confidential. Roni Lifeworks is an organization dedicated to researching community-based projects that are targeted at improving public spaces. RoniLifeworks' mission for this particular project is to conduct qualitative research on King County Parks. They accomplish this by measuring the recreational use of parks. This entails documenting park user's actions at predetermined times for each specific area within the park over a few days, which are also predetermined. During this internship, I was under the guidance of Dr. Jocelyn Enabulele (Roni Lifeworks) and Seth Schromen-Wawrin (Seattle Department of Health). I am deeply passionate about environmental science, and I have always been intrigued by the relationship between humans and the natural environment, therefore this internship was naturally appealing and likely contributed to my ability to secure such an awe-inspiring opportunity to play a significant role in this research project. It has offered me the unique opportunity to dive into and apply some of the knowledge and critical thinking skills I have attained directly in the field. Participating in this internship has allowed me to experience the potential of real-world applications borne from the data collected by engaging in qualitative research that directly impacts the sustainability and governance surrounding an ecosystem and recreational location.

As I started this internship, I had clear learning objectives in mind that were aligned with my career aspirations and academic background. My learning agreement didn't change much through the internship other than highlighting how it helped my career goals. My primary learning objectives were to gain knowledge and experience with conducting professional research independently, understand the importance of data collection, and explore the reason for

measuring the recreational use of parks. I cannot disclose how the data is being used or why it's being collected as this is confidential information and the project is ongoing. I gained knowledge and experience conducting professional research and now better understand how the data I collected may be used for any city decision-making process.

One of the primary learning objectives was to enhance my ability to conduct professional research independently. Throughout the internship, I critically analyzed park spaces by going in on a set schedule to scan for any people and typing in what they were doing at this time through the REDCAP app. As I progressed through the internship, I swiftly collected this data with little to no errors. I also applied theoretical knowledge, such as the Milankovitch Theory, learned from a prior geology class to my daily data collection. It is a theory on the relation to the sun and earth which would also explain why we may be experiencing such excruciating heat this summer alongside climate change. In every park I visited I wondered; why one park would have more people on one day or the other, why this park got more amenities than the other parks, how each park is simultaneously preserving and constraining the dynamics and actions of an ecosystem, what would need to be taken for the park to be sustainable while protecting the environment. This hands-on experience was an invaluable opportunity to help me understand complexities in research, including the importance of attention to detail, critical thinking, and the ability to adapt to unforeseen challenges such as the possibility of traffic and having to call up my supervisor to let them know I can't make it which would need me to conduct the park scan all over on another day since it was crucial to follow this set schedule.

This internship allowed me to apply a vast amount of critical thinking to every park I visited. An example is how I evaluated several people's interactions with the park and its environment. This can be a person walking, hanging out, recreating, biking, or parents just

supervising their kids at play. The assignment required me to analyze people's actions at various times of the day along with their social behaviors. The internship permitted me to freely use theoretical knowledge learned from previous courses in real-world applications. Some of these include applying concepts relating to human interactions, urban ecology, and even public space management in a real-world situation. Some of the parks require environmental awareness be given. In doing research, I found that some parks were trashed and heavily mistreated. I used this firsthand knowledge as an opportunity to apply concepts I learned to relay quality recommendations to park management. They will use these suggestions and research to develop a better approach to maintaining the parks while preserving the environment and ecosystems around them. Through my participation in this internship, I have gained perspective on parks, how they are used recreationally, and how this impacts the environment. Overall, this experience has allowed me to use and further enhance my critical thinking skills as they correlate with environmental issues. This is accomplished by applying theoretical knowledge of environmental science to real-world applications.

This research opportunity has been essential in enhancing my education and career goals. It has furthered my understanding of what qualitative research entails, as well as how to go about conducting it independently. It has expanded and enhanced my skill set, making me a more competitive candidate for scientific research. The experience of analyzing the results and designing conclusions has been very beneficial in preparing me for future endeavors in combating environmental challenges surrounding climate change. It has allowed me to advance my skills in conducting research, including being more critical, applying theoretical knowledge, and developing my own “What if?” questions. That's what research is. It's a methodical way of asking the right questions to uncover new knowledge. I can't answer all of my “What if?”

questions, at least not yet, as it would require me to venture off on my own and conduct additional research, but the “What-if?” questions along with asking the question “Why _____?” is what is often applied in STEM. Being curious is one of the key traits of a scientist.

This internship has been very rewarding. It has solidified the goals I wish to achieve and it has given me a clearer expectation of what my future career might look like. It fulfills graduation requirements while also giving me practical experience with conducting research. I have put myself in a position to take on more advanced roles in scientific research and I am more confident in my ability to make meaningful contributions in that research. I am more eager to earn my bachelor's degree and to join others who are working diligently to preserve our planet.

The courses that I completed and the knowledge that I gained from environmental studies and Biology have played a role in preparing me for the research I tackled and the questions I developed. Environmental studies provided me with a solid foundation in urban ecology and provided me with a deep understanding of park ecosystems which were very essential as I asked myself questions such as “How can this park be improved?”, and “How can we mitigate the carbon emissions from all the people traveling to these parks?”, “Can we involve the community more?”, “Why did the person use the park at this time of the day?”, “Why did this person use the park for this reason?”, “Would they use it more if more was added to the park?”, and even “How is the foot traffic affecting the ecosystem in this area”. Additionally, my biology classes gave me some novice experience with conducting quantitative and qualitative research in my labs. These classes were essential to equip me with the skills necessary to collect, analyze, and interpret all the data effectively.

This was a very beneficial experience offered by Dr. J and her company, Roni LifeWorks. It allowed me to apply the theoretical knowledge I gained from my classes in real-world applications, bridging the gap between my academic learning and practical applications. This internship has given me the confidence and inspiration to conduct scientific research on the effects of climate change. I recommend this internship to those who are looking to grow. They can expand their horizons by applying what they know and using what they know in a practical real-world setting. It's a unique opportunity to work independently and enhance critical thinking skills. It is also an opportunity to gain valuable insights into the real world. This experience provided me with an excellent foundation to grow, not just professionally, but personally.