

**Crowe Horwath LLP Internship Experience**

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### **Autobiographical Section:**

I was born and raised in the Grand Rapids, MI area. I attended Jenison Public Schools for all of my elementary and secondary education. My parents currently live in Hudsonville, MI and I have a younger sister who is a sophomore at Michigan State University. I am proud to say that I have had a job ever since my 16th birthday which was in December of 2002. I was fortunate in that my father owns his own computer software company and I was able to work for him rather than getting a traditional high schooler's job of working at McDonald's. I had my first taste of accounting my senior year in high school when I took an introduction to accounting course. Covering debits and credits was pretty much the extent of the class but I did enjoy it and attribute a small percentage of where I am at today to that class. Between working for my father and my accounting class in high school I decided to major in accounting and was pretty set on attending Grand Valley State University right from the beginning of my college search. I did end up at GVSU for my Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) and I am currently finishing up my Master of Science in Accounting (MSA) degree. In the fall of my third year at GVSU I participated in what is known as "fall recruiting" for accounting majors. Through this, I landed my internship at Crowe Chizek and Company LLC at the time, now, Crowe Horwath LLP.

My biggest hobby as a kid was playing computer games. It's somewhat depressing to think of the amount of time I wasted playing computer games from a young age all the way up through my junior year of high school. However, on another note, it is because of my interest in computer games I became so skilled at working with computers. I must attribute this hobby to my first job, Sierra Consultants LLC, now, Nutech Systems Inc. I worked at Nutech for almost five and a half years, the first two and a half years of which was exclusively in dealing with the

technology that the company sold and working with customer support. Nutech sells wireless data collection solutions for inventory/warehouse management among other things. So, the computer games got me into technology and then the technology got me into business. In the spring of 2005 I graduated from high school and that summer expressed my interest in accounting to Nutech. That summer I spent a week of training in Toronto, CA with the CFO of Nutech at the time, Richard Hutchinson. From that point forward not only did I work with the hardware and customer support, I started to get into various aspects of the accounting for Nutech. By the end of my time at Nutech I was doing everything from managing accounts receivable, handling bank deposits, dealing with state sales tax issues, and invoicing various items. Yes there was a total lack of internal controls (segregation of duties), but hey, it's my dad's company, what was I going to do, steal from him? I don't think so.

So, why did I end up at Grand Valley? After all, I took six advanced placement classes in high school, had above a 4.0, and got a pretty decent score on my ACT test. Well, I knew I wanted to major in accounting and from what I had heard GVSU has a very good accounting program. I also liked the idea of being close to home. Don't get me wrong, I moved out when I started college and have been living on my own ever since, but being able to bring home your laundry every weekend and have a nice home cooked meal? Now that's priceless. (And yes, my mother stopped doing my laundry after freshman year, but I do still get that occasional home cooked meal!). I also feel that spending an exorbitant amount of money on a degree is simply a waste and GVSU was competitively priced.

Regardless of why, GVSU worked for me and I can honestly say I have been very pleased with my college selection. I was in the honors college for my undergraduate degree as well as

having early admittance to the Seidman College of Business. For two years I actively participated in the honorary accounting organization, Beta Alpha Psi, and was on the executive board for one of those years. I graduated from my undergraduate degree in three years and immediately jumped into a masters program. My primary reason for doing was the new 150 credit hour requirement that exists for CPAs to become certified in Michigan.

**Pre-internship:**

My pursuit of an internship began in the early part of winter semester my sophomore year. It all started with a mock interview with Rhonda Huisman from Crowe Chizek (little did I know at the time, Rhonda would be the one hiring me later that year!) The primary motivation behind my internship search was simply this: I was under the impression that if you wanted to work in public accounting, you had to start off by getting an internship. I figured most likely an internship would lead to a job offer and if I didn't the experience I would gain from the internship would certainly help to land that job offer. The internship I finally did get with Crowe started in June of 2008. Prior to my internship starting I had completely virtually all of my undergraduate course requirements, including all the accounting course requirements.

**Recruiting:**

One of the things that has impressed me the most about the accounting program at Grand Valley is the recruiting process/program that has been developed there. I utilized their Career Services department a great deal throughout my internship search. Career Services helped me to set up my mock interview as well as on numerous occasions I met with Troy Farley to discuss my resume, the interview process of fall recruiting, and for general advice. I participated in the annual accounting recruiting night which is put together every year by the

joint efforts of the GVSU chapter of Beta Alpha Psi, Career Services, and all the participating firms and organizations. This event allowed me to meet with over a dozen firms that have offices locally. Through this, I was offered nine interviews of which I accepted five. I was then given three second round interviews which led to one internship offer. The offer was obviously from Crowe and I accepted.

Crowe, however, was not actually my first choice. Originally I was all gung ho for one of the big four firms (primarily Deloitte). After several office visits to firms in Grand Rapids during the fall of my sophomore year I started to lean away from the big four and more towards the second tier firms. That next summer I was invited to attend a series of leadership events hosted by BDO Seidman. These leadership events consisted of an office visitation day, a Whitecaps baseball game, and a two day event in Detroit which included a Tigers game. These leadership events got me very excited about BDO and by the end of the summer I was certain this was the firm for me. After accounting recruiting night I received a call from BDO saying they wanted to skip first round interviews with me and invite me directly to their second round in-office interviews.

I was honestly very disappointed at the time with receiving only one internship offer and shocked, quite frankly, that I did not get an offer from BDO. Seeing as I had no other choice, and honestly Crowe did sound pretty good to me, I accepted an offer for an internship during the summer of 2008. Now it is very easy for me to say that I am very pleased with the way the whole recruiting process turned out because I love it here at Crowe. As a side bonus, three of my good friends also accepted internship offers from Crowe. I think my biggest selling point that helped me get the offer is my personality. People have told me I am a very confident

individual with a great sense of humor who has no problem communicating with people whether they be CEOs or at the staff level. These days so many people seem to have the shining resume that it really comes down to your interviewing skills.

### **Internship Basics:**

Crowe Chizek and Company LLC has undergone a name change over the past year to Crowe Horwath LLP. The primary reason for this name change was to strengthen the relationship between Crowe and its international affiliate Horwath International. Crowe currently has over 20 office locations across the United States with over 2500 personnel.

My internship started on June 2, 2008 at the Grand Rapids, MI office location and had an official end date of August 15, 2008. As that end date approached I expressed interest in wanting to stay on working part time when the fall semester started up if at all possible. I was fortunate in that Crowe met my request and has kept me pretty busy on a part time basis while I finish my masters program. During my official internship timeframe (June through August) I usually worked 45 hour weeks. Since August, my part time work weeks have ranged anywhere from 10 to 45 hours depending on my availability and the amount of work that's available. Needless to say, there has been a great deal of flexibility involved which has been great.

My duties and responsibilities have ranged greatly throughout my internship and up until now. Crowe officially places their interns in a specific business unit (i.e. tax, assurance, risk consulting, etc.) however they try to give their interns wide array of experiences so they can really see for themselves what the various positions in the firm have to offer. I have helped prepare tax returns for individuals, partnerships, and corporations. I gone on two audits, one was a bank and the other was a payroll processing company. I have helped out on a few tax

consulting projects which involved a great deal of advanced Excel spreadsheet work. I also helped with the 2008 Financial Institution Compensation Survey and I am playing a major role in the 2009 Survey. This project involves several hundred banks from various states across mainly the east half of the United States. We collect a vast amount of salary/compensation data from the participants to create state and regional reports as well as a comprehensive report. These reports contain virtually everything a financial institution would want to know regarding how financial institutions of similar size and/or location are compensating their employees (from tellers all the way up to the CEO and board of directors).

**Training:**

The first week of my internship would be considered a formal training session. All the summer 08 interns across the whole country spent the week at the South Bend, IN office going through training. The training sessions covered a great deal of technical items as far as what tools are available and how to basically use them. Two of the five days were spent specifically on technology training. The group of around 85 was split up for the last two days to receive more specific training geared towards tax or audit. I attended the audit training. During those days we covered the general process Crowe uses for its audit engagements. We covered the various software packages/databases that are used and how a typical audit is run.

Crowe's training center is located right next door to the South Bend, IN office and is called the Ronald S. Cohen Learning Center. The setting for this training was a large enough room to seat all the interns and have our computers hooked up so that we could follow along with the various demonstrations. Additionally, all of the evenings during that week were planned

for us. Crowe had lined up a variety of dinners and events for us which involved mostly leadership and teambuilding activities.

The other formal training we received was more leadership and teambuilding than actual training. For the week of July 7<sup>th</sup> all the summer interns as well as a dozen or so Crowe personnel traveled to Leadville, CO for an Outward Bound program. This trip involved a day of whitewater rafting and an eco-challenge day. Also, in the evenings we had various speakers from the firm including the CFO and the COO.

As far as informal training is concerned every intern and new hire is assigned a coach. This coach is someone who we can go to with questions any time. Everyone is generally willing to stop what they are doing to help out the newbies regardless if they are your coach or not. Of course we exhausted the other interns with our questions before we brought them to anyone higher up. When on audits, interns generally work on one task at a time while having access to the rest of the audit team to bounce questions off of.

The vast majority of my responsibilities I have learned how to do on the job. That's not to say all of my college courses have been a waste of time. I definitely see my classroom knowledge as a foundation from which on the job training can build up from. There have been several direct carryovers from the classroom to the work environment. For instance, my Excel course gave me additional skills which I use almost every day. Also, it makes listening to explanations/directions much easier when you know the technical terminology being used (topics from intermediate account for example). I have seen an opposite effect in my ACC 614 Auditing course where the class is easier now based on my experiences at the firm.

I guess I have always seen a college degree as just a big hurdle you have to jump over to get a job and that everything you need to know for the job you actually learn when you get there. Of course it is much easier to say that now because I already have a college degree and I'm sure the on the job training (both formal and informal) I received would not have been hardly as effective without the foundation knowledge that my college experience has provided.

One thing is certain, after you receive a job offer priorities tend to shift away from school. Before I received my offer I was pretty much a straight A student compared to afterwards where I'm closer to half A's and half B's. The fact of the matter is there is only so much time in the day and I would much rather be spending my time preparing for the CPA exam (which I will be sitting for starting April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009) or experiencing new opportunities at work.

**Career:**

Even before I began searching for an internship I was certain I wanted to start my career in public accounting. Based on conversations with several individuals including professors at Grand Valley and professionals from the area, it was made quite clear to me that a career start in public accounting can open many doors and act as a 'spring board' to where ever your career takes you. In fact, of the four interviews that I declined during fall recruiting, three were from private sector companies. Will I stay in public accounting forever? Your guess is as good as mine. I honestly can't say, but I am sure that it will be fun figuring out!

I was also fairly certain that I wanted to be involved in audit rather than tax. My internship experience solidified my feelings towards audit vs. tax and I accepted a full time offer from the audit/assurance group at Crowe. Since then, however, the firm has asked me to start

in the risk consulting group instead. They told me my excellent communication skills and desire for travel would make me an excellent candidate for this group. I took this as a compliment and accepted. I think Crowe offered me a job because of my enthusiastic attitude, excellent communication skills, and willingness to help out on whatever project that could utilize me.

I am quite satisfied with the offer itself. The starting salary and signing bonus are very competitive. Also, I am happy to be starting at the Grand Rapids office. I do want to move away from West Michigan eventually, however, I currently own a home in the area and given the state of the housing market and economy it's looking like I'll be around for a couple years. One thing that excited me about the risk consulting group was the fact that they do not staff their engagements based on staff location. This means I could move to pretty much any other office location in the future if I desired.

With the acceptance of this offer I also decided I was not going to be seeking any other offers. I attended fall recruiting this past fall, however, only as 'guest' and I did not speak with any other firms. I figured if I enjoy my co-workers, the corporate culture, my work itself, and I'm happy with the compensation, why bother looking for something else?

**Internship Course:**

I am glad Grand Valley allows their students to take internships for credit. I was able to count my summer internship for three credits in my graduate program. Other than actually having and participating in an internship there were a few additional responsibilities in order to get the course credit. There were three main items, a paper on the history of the firm, several group discussion posts on Blackboard, and a final paper somewhat similar to this one in nature however less comprehensive (it also included examples of the work I did). I feel the history of

the firm and the final papers were sufficient enough to satisfy for 'course credit'. The group discussion posts were nothing more than a pain my side to me. I managed to participate with a few posts however I was late in responding and put very little effort into them (sorry Dori!).

**Assessment/Recommendations:**

Overall, my internship experience met if not exceeded my expectations. Whitewater rafting... what??? Apparently that is a crucial skill that must be mastered before you can become a staff accountant in a public accounting firm these days. But seriously, I have learned so much, made both great new friends and contacts, made some good money, and had a lot of fun! I would certainly recommend an accounting internship (with any firm for that matter) to anyone looking at going into a business career. Having the opportunities to really see how a variety of companies operate gives you a great deal of insight and experience which can be used to advance your career whether continuing in public accounting or not.

I absolutely feel like I have an edge in my masters' courses over anyone who has not had an internship experience. I'm not saying I think I'm smarter than them or even that I will get a better grade than them. I'm saying that I feel I can take a class lecture and squeeze more out of it than someone who has not had an internship simply based on relating to real life experiences. All in all, an internship provides real world experience that is, in my opinion, worth far more than what they pay in mere dollars and cents to anyone just starting their career. One thing is certain, in this day and age it is a fierce competition getting an internship and I can see it only getting fiercer. It is a wonderful feeling when all those years of hard work finally start to pay off; I am truly thankful and feel truly blessed!