Episode 12 - Here, There, and Everywhere - Externships & Tre...

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**SPEAKERS**

Ashley, Yuina, Leslie Bleichner, Danny Perkins, Nicholas Lampietti

**Leslie Bleichner** 00:00

I think Grinnellians are really great at intellectualizing a lot of stuff like we do the reading, we have these rich discussions. But there's something to be said about how do the ideas that we have in our heads like look and feel in real time? And like what are the real implications of that? The education that you're getting--like in place like--in the 50112 is wonderful, but to expand that learning outside of our borders, I think is really a wonderful opportunity.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 00:36

That's Leslie Bleichner. When we recorded this episode, Leslie was the Director of the Education Professions Career Community here at the CLS. Now, she serves as the Assistant Chief Diversity Officer for the College. A member of the Class of 2007, Leslie knows what it means to be Grinnellian and feel like you have the world in your fingertips. On today's episode, we explore two of the incredible travel opportunities organised by the CLS: the externship program and treks. You'll get the inside scoop from experts who put them together and stories from students who've gone all over the country. From the Center for Careers, Life and Service in Grinnell College, I'm Nicholas Lampietti. Stay with us. First up, what is an externship? Here's Danny Perkins, CLS Exploratory Advisor and Coordinator of the Externship Program.

**Danny Perkins** 01:36

Yeah, so an externship--I know the word gets a little bit confusing because it's so similar to internship. But an externship is a shorter term experience that's more of a job shadow. So you're not completing actual work for an employer so much as you're learning and observing. Versus an internship that is much more in depth. Usually it's longer and involves some sort of hands on work. The externship program through Grinnell College and CLS is a program that happens over spring break. And it historically has been shadowing alumni of the College who volunteer their time to host students. We do have some hopes that we'll be able to eventually have some parents of Grinnell College students. Right now--this year, every host is an alum. Our--Grinnell College's spring break is two weeks long, which is I think, a little unusual compared to most places. It's, you know, pretty lengthy, which is really nice because it means that you can participate in this kind of activity and still do other things--whether that's traveling to see family or something with a student organization. Typically an externship we say is about three to five days in length, but it's really up to the student and the host. So every experience is really individual.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 02:54

Now, I wanted to get a sense of the application process.

**Danny Perkins** 02:57

So, we begin the process the November before the spring break. So for instance, right now: Spring Break 2022, we have 52 externs that will be going on with hosts. It's a really robust program; it's very exciting. Those externs attended information sessions this past November--in early November, where they got information about the application process. And then after that, they reviewed a list of hosts that were available and ranked their top three out of the externship hosts. Then they put together a resume, and they filled out an application form that was actually to customize their answers around those hosts. So that's why that step happens first. Then students submit their application. And it actually--this past year is really unique. This is the first year that our hosts were also able to have some input in the students that were matched with them. The students ranked three hosts from one to three that they thought would be a good fit. And then the host actually got those applications and ranked the students back. Also new this year: this was the first year that we intentionally offered virtual experiences. Virtual externships did happen in 2020 and 2021, but it wasn't really something that was on purpose. It was our way of adapting to the pandemic. There are some fields right now that are really moving to more of a remote work environment. So that gives students who might be looking at those fields or might in their future be thinking about a remote work environment--it gives them an opportunity to experience that. And it gives hosts who don't work outside their home an opportunity to offer an externship. This year for instance, all four class years of students were eligible to apply. And--I really--any field that a person could be interested in, if you just think about all of our current Grinnell students and their really vast, huge array of interests, our alums have that too.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 05:06

I wanted to hear from a student about their externship journey. Here's Ashley, a first year from Vestal, New York, and intended English and French double major.

**Ashley** 05:16

So, I've always kind of known that I want to go pre-law--like go to law school after Grinnell. And I talked with my Career Community Advisor, Katie Kriegel about this. And she--she told me about the externship program and how I should apply. And then when the host list came out, I immediately was just so excited about all the different places I could go, the people I could meet, and the connections that just arise out of it.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 05:41

I asked Ashley about the application process and where she was headed. This was recorded before spring break.

**Ashley** 05:47

I thought it was pretty straightforward. Um--there was an application form that we had to fill out like a Qualtrics form. And I spent maybe a week and maybe a week and a half--um--just kind of writing. I think there were like 10 questions that we just had to write out, 250 words each. And they were really catered to my interests and why I was choosing this externship. And I thought it was pretty straightforward. I applied right before we went off for winter break, kind of around finals week of sorts. And then I found out over break. I was actually like in the car with my mom when I found out. It was very--it was a moment. And I'm heading there this weekend. I'm heading to Seattle, Washington. My host, Jennifer Joy

**Nicholas Lampietti** 06:33

She works in the Office of Legal Counsel at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

**Ashley** 06:37

set up these calls with three lawyers who work in three different divisions and also three students--three Grinnell students actually. Grinnell alums who are in law school, or who just graduated out of law school. And I get to talk to these six people over my time. I'm spending three days in the city, a total different scene from Grinnell.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 06:59

I wanted to find out what makes this such an exciting and valuable opportunity. Back to Danny.

**Danny Perkins** 07:04

I am a really big believer in testing out interests without a huge commitment whenever possible. Sometimes, you know, it is incredible to do a 12-week internship or dive into a postgraduate job and really experience a field that way. But that is a huge commitment of your time and your energy. So the idea that you can test out fields and see them really in depth in a way that's more manageable and really get a feel to adjust your interest.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 07:37

I think we can agree this sounds like a pretty cool way to spend your spring break.

**Danny Perkins** 07:41

We really try to make sure that we're walking students through the process all the way from when you find out your placement--which is typically in mid-January, after the hosts have returned their matches, right? But once you find out your placement, we actually have two orientations for students. So the students can see who else is in the program, can ask questions, we can set some expectations about different work environments. And for those students who might be doing an in-person experience, they can also get some information about travel and the steps required. And then students who will be traveling in-person, right? And we do have some local in-person ones, but students where they will be in-person and they'll be traveling, can apply for travel funds through CLS. And one factor of that is your financial aid need-level. But we have a budget worksheet that students fill out and then a short application form. And we do award travel funds to most students who apply for it. We want to really make sure that there's no one who feels like they can't participate in the experience. For me what has been really impactful is the enthusiasm for it. I know that our current student population hasn't had the ability to do that many things, either in person or connecting with people in different career fields because of the pandemic. And for me, it's been really meaningful to see the excitement and the enthusiasm that students have brought, how seriously they took their applications, and just hearing from students who are talking with their hosts and making plans.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 09:19

Speaking of plans, let's check back in with Ashley.

**Ashley** 09:23

I'm just really looking forward to being able to shadow Jennifer--being able to just truly like, see what a day--day is like in her life--and being able to talk to all these people who have different perspectives and who are all willing to share different stories and how they got to where they are now. And I think this advice and this kind of human connection that I'm making with them is really important and I'm truly so excited about it.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 09:49

Oh, and one more thing. I wanted to ask Danny about her dream externship.

**Danny Perkins** 09:55

If I had to pick from one of the current externships, I would say there's--this ceramic artist who has their own ceramic studio. I went to art school, I loved ceramic work, and I just think it sounds amazing. So I'm a little jealous of the student who's going to do that; I'm so happy for them. Can't wait to hear about it. Now, when I was in college, I did spend a summer reviewing scripts for a production company for films and getting the help go through their slush pile, and rank them, and make notes. And that was really interesting for me. It's not something I went into for a career, but that was kind of my equivalent, and I have really fond memories of it.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 10:43

The externship program is just one of the travel-related opportunities offered by the CLS. Remember Leslie? I sat down with her to learn more about treks.

**Leslie Bleichner** 10:53

To give you the short definition of what a trek is, it's just an opportunity for a group of students that are interested in a particular industry or a particular topic, to go and travel to a place to explore that topic or explore that industry. And so the trek part is--is the travel part, but we have done treks locally. We've explored different aspects of of city government like in Grinnell, and so we've trekked in town as a group or a cohort to sort of explore that subject. So that's locally, but we've traveled as far as South Africa to explore what education looks like abroad. So it's really about a topic, a group of people, and then traveling together to do a deep dive into that topic. For the most part, treks live in the Career Communities. And so there are seven of us and we try to alternate between treks and symposia. The pandemic has sort of disrupted that pattern, but we tried to do like a local symposia where we do a deep dive of a topic on campus and sort of bring the world to us. And then in alternate years, again, as I mentioned before, we kind of take that topic and go--we go out into the world to explore it.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 12:16

So I wanted to find out about what it looks like to create a trek.

**Leslie Bleichner** 12:19

You know, the career community directors, we have all kinds of ideas. And sometimes those ideas spring internally and sometimes they come in with outreach from our industry friends or alumni who are really interested in connecting with students. So that process sort of happens organically. For this year's trek, just uh--you know, spoiler alert. Chuck Lewis and Penny Sebring, who are our very generous donors and alumni who support Ed Pros, really wanted to get all of the groups together. So that's how we were like, 'Okay, we're gonna take a trip to Chicago.' So--so the ideas of how those things come together, can happen often organically or often sometimes from like a very specific ask. And so once we figure out what the topic is, and where we're going to go, it's really just putting together an itinerary to explore that topic in a variety of different ways. So for example, the last Ed Pros trek happened in 2019 and they went to Boston. And I say they because I wasn't on staff at the time, but they went to Boston. And so while they were there, they got to connect with--with other students that were currently like interested in education. They toured some graduate schools, connected with some alumni in their places of employ--so toured a couple of schools, toured a nonprofit, and then also just got to see what it was like to be in Boston and have like larger conversations about the education landscape in Boston from a variety of different lenses. And so that took place in formal settings--excuse me--and informal settings, like over dinner and connecting with alumni. So it was really about exploring that topic interpersonally like in place, but also like in the workplace, like in schools, in graduate schools, in--in policymakers' offices, that sort of stuff. And so that's sort of how things get planned. And then we also in the application process, get insights from our students as well. So in the application, we asked, you know, "why are you wanting to go on this trek? How does this fit into the goals that you have, not only while you're currently a student, but what you hope to connect to after you graduate?" And we take that feedback and try to imbue that into the trek as well. So the theme of this year's trek is exploring possibilities in the new normal. And I know we all roll our eyes when we hear 'the new normal,' but I mean, fundamentally like the pandemic has not only revealed a lot of things and so we just want to do a deep dive and like what that means for education. And again, as I mentioned, Chuck and Penny are located in Chicago and haven't seen us all in a while. They support Ed Pros at Grinnell, but they also support Ed Pros Career Communities at two other institutions: the University of Chicago and Amherst College. And so it's also going to be a great opportunity to bring students together from all three campuses to sort of explore education, and how it looks on our different campuses. But then connecting with practitioners in the city of Chicago to brainstorm our ideas. And so it's going to be--it's going to be a quick trip. Normally, treks are, you know, anywhere from four to seven days long. We're going to do a quick 24 hours, but it's sure to be a really impactful day, where again, students from all three campuses can not only reflect on their own experience, but can really bring to light and build a brain trust around the ideas that they're percolating for how you all want to build your future.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 16:08

At this point, Leslie had pretty much sold me. And she didn't actually need to since I was already a part of the group trekking to Chicago. But since you already hear plenty of me, I thought I'd have Yuina tell you a little bit about the trip. She's a first year, originally from Chiba, Japan, hoping to major in sociology and computer science.

**Yuina** 16:27

But in general, I'm very interested in education, and I'm hoping to work in the field of education in the future. What got me interested is that I moved schools a lot when I was little, and I was born in Japan, but I moved to the US, and then back to Japan, and then to the UK. And then back to Japan again for high school. And then I'm here in the US, again for college. So I did a lot of changing schools and settling into new environments. And sometimes it was tough, but it was all worth it because I got to know a lot of great friends that I have today. And I got to learn a lot of new things about myself and about other cultures. So yeah--so I'm very interested in education and working in that field in the future. So that's why I participated.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 17:23

And of course, I found out what she was looking forward to.

**Yuina** 17:26

I hope to work in the field of education in the future, but I have no idea what kind of jobs are out there. So I hope to get to meet some new people and get to know them and see what kind of careers are out there, and what kind of skills there are that you can use in the field. And, yeah, in general, I just hope to get to know people and explore.

**Leslie Bleichner** 17:53

And that's truly at the heart of what a trek is--is like being able to see education-in-action, or business and finance-in-action or STEM-in-action. And to see how people live, like while they're at work, but also outside of work. Like, you know, we're in rural Iowa, and education--I'm speaking from Ed Pros because that's my career community--and education looks one way, but education looks really, really differently in Chicago or in Boston or in Johannesburg or London. Just like STEM looks one way in Iowa, it looks differently in Seattle, you know, which is a huge tech hub--which is a trek that they went out a few years ago. Business looks differently in Iowa than it does in Minneapolis--which is the last business and finance trick that happened. So again, being able to intellectualize is one thing, but to experience it in place and talk to people who are living it, walking it breathing it every day is really powerful and can have a deep impact on how you all shape your choices for what you choose to do after you leave. And so that experiential learning, I think, is irreplaceable. And I really want to encourage all students to do it. The application process is really simple--it's a Qualtrics form, which I know we all--we survey you all to death. But it really is a quick and easy way. We get your information, we ask you three short answers, and they're really just an opportunity for us to get to know you better--"why are you interested in the track? What do you want to learn or see while you're in place? And how do you think this is going to impact your life after you graduate?" And so we want to take that data and make sure that we make data informed decisions that's really going to create an experience that's going to be enriching for you. And then we talk logistics. We get together. We go over itineraries. We make sure that we have all your information so that you can travel safely. We go over college policies and like what it looks like when we do travel together. And then we also just take some time to like build some group cohesion. I'm excited that you get to come with us on this trek and I'm excited about the group that we have going together. We all have had really, really great conversations and I'm looking forward to like deepening those relationships with you.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 20:24

I should also mention that treks are free. Seriously! If that didn't seal the deal, I don't know what would. And of course, I couldn't let Leslie go without asking her to tell me about her dream trek.

**Leslie Bleichner** 20:38

Probably like--my completely like unprofessional answer would be to go to a place that I've always wanted to visit to just to eat and explore like wonderful cuisine. And so like I would probably first and foremost plan like a food themed trek and then like interweave like career stuff in there later. So that's my unprofessional answer.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 21:03

Fast forward two weeks, Yuina and Ashley have gone off on their adventures. After spring break, I wanted to check in with them and hear about their experiences.

**Yuina** 21:24

It was genuinely such a fun experience. I got to talk to so many people who have the same interest as me: education. But they all had different approaches to education and they all had different goals within the field of education. So that was so interesting to see.

**Ashley** 21:43

Seattle was wonderful. It was so lovely to be there. Didn't--didn't rain actually.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 21:50

No way!

**Ashley** 21:52

Yeah, I got to see the sun! This externship was one of the best opportunities that I have experienced at Grinnell. I seriously would recommend it to anyone who's thinking of applying next year. I came out of it and I was like, 'I'm so excited to go into the law field.'

**Nicholas Lampietti** 22:06

I thought this was also a good time to ask them about their expectations versus reality.

**Yuina** 22:12

So as an intended computer science major, I am currently trying to figure out how to use my degree in computer science to contribute to the Edtech industry in the future. And I did not expect to hear from an entrepreneur in the field of education technology. Yeah, and I think Brianne was her name and she actually--entrepreneurship wasn't like an--an option for me in my mind when I thought of like, how to--how to get into education technology. I didn't really think of, you know, starting up my own organization as a pathway into Edtech. So that was really interesting to hear. Although I'm still kind of figuring things out. It was unexpected, but it was a really nice surprise to hear from someone from the industry.

**Ashley** 23:08

I guess I was expecting something--um like--I think what the experience that I was given was significantly more than I was expecting. My externship host was so thoughtful and she really tried to cater to what I was interested in--which was the--the law field. And so she set up all these different interviews with all of her connections and every single person there was really willing to talk and really willing to help. One of the reasons why I found--I kind of connected with my host when I was applying for this externship was because she identified on our sheet that she was an Asian American female. And as an Asian American woman myself at Grinnell, like I thought it was--it would be really interesting to kind of talk to a Grinnellian who's kind of been through and experience what it's like to be at Grinnell with that background. Her roommate is also a Grinnellian and so I was staying with two Grinnellians at the time.

**Nicholas Lampietti** 24:01

Last but not least, I asked them to describe their biggest takeaways.

**Yuina** 24:06

I think being able to talk to similar college students who have an interest in education just inspired me so much and it motivated me a lot. And it's--it's made my drive for, like, improvement in the education industry so much stronger. I've been able to make so many connections. Genuinely just--it just made me so much more interested in education. And I've realized that there are so many aspects of education that you can approach and that's something that I had known, but I think--it kind of--I was reminded of it during this trek.

**Ashley** 24:53

I think there was a lot of bonding. We ate almost all of our meals together. This is kind of weird, but she kind of became almost like an older sister for me. She gave me a lot of advice and she was like 'when I was your age maybe like 5-10 years ago, like this is what I would have wanted to have done. These are the financial'--she gave me a lot of financial advice on how she would approach grad school. She gave me advice--um just personal advice. My favorite piece of advice was from one of the lawyers that I talked to. And she mentioned that in this world where people--not just girls are--a--are kind of talked down to and expected to kind of conform to their own little box. She said to "embrace who you are, and kind of work with that. Don't change yourself to match what other people expect of you. Show them that you're perfectly capable of doing above and beyond what they expect without changing yourself."

**Nicholas Lampietti** 25:50

I truly can't think of a better way to end than that. Although it might seem like a ways away, 2023 externships and treks will be here before you know it. I hope you consider taking advantage of these incredible opportunities. The world really is at our fingertips. This episode was produced by Nicholas Lampietti. Our executive producer is Katie Kriegel. For more information, send us an email at goingforth@grinnell.edu. Find us on Instagram @goingforthpodcast and on Twitter @goingforthpod.