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Disney Dreams in Real Life

 Molly North joyfully listens to the sound of fireworks outside. Although she is inside at work in the Emporium, the Walt Disney World main gift shop, North is gleeful just listening to the sound from the fireworks.

North said she never got disappointed on the nights she missed the firework show because of work. She loved her job and the program she was a part of. North, along with more than 8,000 collegians, was an intern for the Disney College Program.

The Disney College Program was established in 1981, and in the beginning was limited to students from about 20 colleges in the United States. Interns of the program were limited to working only at the Magic Kingdom Park in Walt Disney World, which is located in Lake Buena Vista, F.L.

The program has grown tremendously, and today, both Disney parks, Walt Disney World and Disneyland in Anaheim, C.A., participate in the program. Over 300 universities now offer the program to students.

The program is a semester-long paid internship. Participants get on-the-job experience through a variety of positions. Students can choose to work in operations, lodging, food and beverage, retail and sales, recreation and entertainment.

Along with on-the-job experience, students also participate in on-site Disney Education Courses. Students tailor their learning by picking the classes they wish to take. Some students even receive credit from their university.

North picked corporate analysis for her Disney Education Course. In that class, North learned about the decisions Disney makes, why Disney makes them and if past choices proved beneficial or harmful.

North said she loved learning in the classroom, but the most important lesson she learned came from her on-the-job experience at the Emporium.

“The most important lesson I learned was to take advantage of every opportunity you have with guests,” North said. “Guests travel from all over the world to visit Disney. They save up for years to bring their children to this magical place.”

“Guests expect to leave all worries back home. They want a positive, relaxing vacation, and it was my job to create happiness and make magic every single day.”

North only stayed in the Disney College Program for one semester. Once she finished the program, North declined the opportunity to stay for another semester or apply for a professional internship.

 North said she was sad to leave the program, but also anxious to get back to Louisiana State University and begin her senior year.

Although North’s time with the Disney College Program is over, Lindsey Bennett, a graduating senior at LSU, is just beginning her journey.

Bennett will gradate from LSU in May with a degree in mass communication. Unlike many graduates who continue their education or take a job right after college, Bennett decided she wanted to take a different path, which included the Disney College Program. .

She decided to apply to the program as a graduating senior because she could not bear to miss one semester at LSU.

“I’ve always been interested in the Disney College Program, but I never felt like I could leave LSU,” Bennett said. “I felt that as a graduating senior this was a chance I should take advantage of while I’m young and have fewer responsibilities.”

The Disney College Program offers participants a wide variety of positions. Bennett said she is excited to hold the position of Character Attendant. The main responsibility of this position is to assist the volunteers who are dressed up as Disney characters.

“Meeting your favorite characters for the first time is such a memorable experience,” Bennett said. “I’m so excited that I get to see the magic happen close-up.”

Bennett said she is not sure if she’ll extend her stay when she has finished her semester. Along with the Disney College Program, Disney offers professional internships. Bennett said she is strongly considering applying for a professional internship when her Disney College Program is complete.

Bennett laughed, and said, “I know that I have to go to the real world eventually, but I’d like to put that off for as long as possible.”

Bennett’s end-goal is to obtain a job with Disney. She said that working for Disney could lead to many opportunities within the Disney Company including ABC, Marvel and Walt Disney Productions. Bennett’s not sure which job she wants as of yet, but she knows she wants to stay with Disney.

Bennett said she believes her time at Disney will help her narrow her focus and find a job she is truly passionate about.

 Although Bennett would like to work for Disney, North said her dream job is to be a speech-language pathologist.

 Even though North does not plan to return to Disney for work, she is always encouraging students to give the program a try.

 “I am thankful for the opportunity I had at the Disney College Program every single day,” North said. “It inspired me to share my experiences with others. I want other college students to know about the amazing opportunity that is available for them.”

 North said her experience was extremely positive and that she would not make any changes to the program.

 “Even if I did have an idea of something that could be changed, I’m sure Disney is already addressing the issue because that’s just how Disney works,” North said. “Disney is always ten steps ahead!”

 North continues to keep in touch with the friends she met at the program. She said her experience is one that she hopes every participant will have.

 “It’s a once in a lifetime opportunity, an amazing learning experience and a work experience like no other,” North said. “I will forever be thankful for the memories and friends I made there. I hope all students in the program experience the joy and magic that I did.”