



Researcher:
**Siyang Zhou - DPhil in
Education**

Business:
Global Academy Jobs

Authored by Dr. Tanja Collavo

The project idea

Siyang had recently started her DPhil in education to explore the language benefits that international students gain from studying in the UK. While she was hoping that the DPhil would lead to an academic career, she was still not sure whether her future would work out as planned. During her master in Cambridge she had done a marketing internship, where she had posted blogs on the company's website, and created slides and posters for the events they were organising. During that experience, Siyang had realised that she liked to combine her creativity and passion for education with a marketing role. Moreover, many of her friends worked in marketing and they were not only enjoying it but also developing promising career paths. Therefore, while being fully committed to her DPhil, Siyang wanted to keep exploring the opportunities that education marketing could offer her.

She looked into different options to achieve this goal and found on the Oxford University Careers website an interesting opportunity: the micro-internship scheme. The micro-internship scheme offers Oxford students (undergraduate, master and DPhils) the possibility to work for a week at a business or not-for-profit organisation to gain new skills and test out how it feels like to work in a sector or function they might be interested in. These opportunities are usually located near Oxford, therefore involving very little disruption to the work routine, and usually come with a reimbursement for lunch expenses.

Siyang liked very much the idea of doing a micro-internship. The commitment of one week felt ideal to learn more about marketing and corporate jobs in the UK while not causing a potential disruption to the progress of the DPhil or the need to work on the project half-heartedly due to the presence of multiple commitments. Another advantage was that the process of applying for a micro-internship was not too time-consuming as it required only the sending of her CV and of a short cover letter.

Therefore, Siyang started to put together an application for an organisation that was almost a perfect match for what she was looking for. Her two main goals were to gain some marketing experience in the education sector, to see if that could indeed be a good Plan B in case her academic career didn't take off, and to learn more about ▶

digital marketing, since she had not been exposed to it in her previous jobs and internships. Global Academy Jobs, an Oxford marketing start-up promoting available academic jobs from partner universities to early career researchers worldwide, was offering just that. They were looking for a micro-intern helping to create content for their newsletter and website and managing their social media presence.

Her application to Global Academy Jobs was successful and Siyang worked for them for a week during the Easter break 2019 as Digital Marketing and Communications Intern. Like in most internships, her main duties were many and ranged from populating with new posts their profiles on Twitter and Facebook and creating blogs and gifs, to editing videos and managing the Weibo account that the company had

specifically for the Chinese market, which they saw a key opportunity for scaling up in the near future.

These tasks allowed her to practice using software she already knew, such as WordPress and Mailchimp, which are used for marketing newsletters, and, most importantly, made her discover and learn how to use new software such as Hootsuite, which helps to post the same content across different social media channels, and Adobe Premier, a professional video-editing tool. On the very first day, she also had to stretch the limits of her creativity and entrepreneurial spirit, as she was asked to produce tailored gifs to attract interest from scholars in specific disciplines, such as chemistry and geography. She had never done that before but did not want to disappoint and so she self-taught how to do them in just a few hours with the help of Google and other websites she found.

Overall, the internship went as planned, but, as it happens in any job or project, some small changes took place because of emerging opportunities. For example, in the week of the internship there happened to be a talk in the Education Department about academic publishing that interested Siyang and that she realised could be of potential interest for Global Academy Jobs too. Therefore, she asked her line manager if she could take a short break from her work and go. She was very pleased that the line manager not only agreed but also asked her to write a blog about it, thus making it an official internship task. Siyang was very happy to be able to hit two birds with one stone.

Reflecting back on her experience as a micro-intern, Siyang believes that it had a very positive influence on her. It boosted her confidence by showing her that she can perform well also in non-academic jobs and that her skills and passion could have value for various organisations. She now feels reassured about her ability to learn new things and about the fact that opportunities in industry would also be interesting. At the same time, it also helped her to realise that, if possible, she would indeed prefer an academic job. While doing the micro-internship, she missed the flexibility of being able to work when she felt like it, rather than having to be in the workplace 9am-5pm. This said, she would absolutely repeat the experience and even do a longer internship if she had the opportunity. The future is too uncertain to put all the eggs in one basket.

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Key benefits & challenges

While being a very short experience, the micro-internship was very intense and presented both benefits and challenges. According to Siyang, the key benefit was the development of new skills and knowledge. She accumulated hands-on experience in digital marketing and learned how to use new tools and software. For example, by working on social media profiles, she learnt to use or improved her mastery of various software and discovered the necessary tricks to create and post gifs online. Siyang believes that, in case she will want to develop a career in education marketing, knowing the existence of this software, its use for marketing purposes and how to work with it will provide a significant boost to her CV.

Moreover, she developed a better understanding of corporate culture in the UK and of the global academic job market. One of her tasks was writing a blog post about the salaries for academic jobs in different countries. This enhanced her understanding of differences and similarities across countries and made her aware of the need to collect information from multiple sources, before being able to write something credible even for a short blog post. She noticed that different rankings had very different lists of countries and average salaries and that many of them did not take into consideration other contextual information, such as the cost of living. Doing this exercise made her

aware that research skills could be very relevant for many different purposes.

Siyang was also very proud of having developed new friendships and connections in such a short time. She is still in touch with her manager, who is a very nice person to collaborate with and talk to, and with whom she caught up occasionally after the internship finished. The micro-internship made her realise that creating and maintaining relationships is key for any future career and she is very happy to know that her colleagues liked to have her around and keep a good memory of her.

On the flip side, there were also some challenges. The biggest one was to fit in the corporate culture from moment one. Given the very short time available, Siyang sometimes felt the need for more explanations and clarifications about the tasks that she was meant to do and her expected behaviour while at the organisation. For example, she wasn't sure when and how to interrupt her supervisor if he was busy with his own tasks. In order to minimize disruption in the absence of clear guidelines, Siyang learnt to wait and to combine multiple questions in a single message on Slack, while working on other tasks when waiting for his reply. This way, her supervisor had the opportunity to look at them when he had some time, decide whether he had to prioritize his own work or helping her out and respond when it suited his timetable the most.

Advice for other researchers

There are two key things that Siyang believes it is good to keep in mind when approaching a micro-internship. The first is to be a sociable person. In order to maximize the learning and networking opportunity, it can be helpful to ask your boss, line manager or colleagues out for lunch, in order to get to know them better. This is also likely to make the experience more enjoyable. The second is to take notes of all that is being learnt on the job. It is easy to forget even simple steps when you are not familiar with a task, so it is always good to jot down all the little things that they tell you or that you learn, in order to have them at hand later, when doubts about procedures and solutions arise.