Contents

1. Finding Out & Overbearing Excitement

2. Arrival in New York City (Staten Island & Manhattan)

3. General Assembly Week & Start of Internship

4. The Work Ahead

5. The Work Environment

6. Amusing Events in New York City & Musings

7. Reflection and Thanks
Finding Out & Overbearing Excitement

Picture the scene: it’s a chilly, windy February day and I’m wrapped up in bed with a rather nasty bout of winter flu. It’s around nine in the morning when I wake up due to an incoming call from an unknown number, assuming it’s most likely a tele-marketing company or somebody asking if I was aware I could claim for an accident I’d never had. Nevertheless, I answered the phone with my somewhat-husky voice and to my surprise, on the other end was Jenny Swan from the Alumni Office. At this stage I had an idea about what she could be calling to say but I didn’t let my mind get ahead of me. A few seconds later, it had been confirmed - I was to be the lucky 11th recipient of the extremely prestigious Fiona Watson Memorial Award. I was going to New York City to intern for the United Nations!

Within ten minutes I’d told those close to me the exciting news. It was met with mixed reactions: my partner speechless, my best friend in awe and my Mother positively purring with excitement about what lay ahead for me. Next came the unavoidable Facebook post, met with flooding messages of congratulations and excitement. Messages were flooding in for the next forty-eight hours, whether it were by text, e-mail, Facebook or phone call, everyone I knew had something to say or wise words of advice to pass on!

Of course it didn’t take me long to seek more information on New York itself by reading up as much information as I could, whilst also getting informed about the United Nations Headquarters and its resolute work in years gone by. In the same week I found out about the prize, I was in Waterstones flicking through (and purchasing!)
numerous travel guides and books on how best to travel around in New York City (it’s the subway, by the way!)

Other invaluable sources of information for me included: previous interns' reports, the ‘UN HQ Interns' page on Facebook and of course the Fiona Watson Internship Guru herself, Jenny Swan. A special mention also goes to Colleen Tait and Claire Grant, who took the time out to meet up with me over lunch and fill me in on the A-Z of the internship itself. Lastly, whilst working at Edinburgh Airport over the summer, I took every opportunity I could to quiz holiday makers from New York everything I could about their personal tips for navigating the city and where was the best place for young people to go. Locals are always in the know; if you get the chance to ask any for advice, grab it with both hands!
Arrival in New York City (Staten Island & Manhattan)

With two rather-overloaded suitcases and a stuffed handbag in tow, I set off on the short seven-mile journey to Edinburgh Airport in the car. Upon arrival, I took my checked baggage to United Airlines’ desk and answered some questions about my imminent trip to NYC. With baggage all checked in and set to go, I said my goodbyes and went through to security. This was it!

After a seven-and-a-half hour flight and a lot of discussion with a similarly-aged girl named Stephanie, we landed at Newark Airport in the dazzling sunshine. A breathtaking view of the iconic skyline of New York City across the water greeted us to the United States of America. A long and muddled queue, some security questions and a taxi later and I had reached my accommodation on Staten Island, the smallest of New York’s five boroughs. I was to be staying with a half-German family in a grand old Edwardian-era house only steps away from the Hudson River which offered a spectacularly-picturesque view of Manhattan.

My first evening was well spent with my new host family, getting to know the other tenant from Germany and the family. We chatted for most of the evening and I was told which streets were safe and which to avoid in the local vicinity. When the overbearing tiredness from jet lag got the better of me, I headed to bed excited to explore my new surroundings the next day.
Day two in New York arrived; time to get on the free-of-charge Staten Island Ferry over to Manhattan Island. Equipped with an on-board cafe, free Wi-Fi and decks which you were able to enjoy the sun on, the Staten Island Ferry was a welcome twenty-two minute boat ride offering its own tour of the Statue of Liberty en route!

Unusually iconic commute - The Statue of Liberty!
3. Amusing events in New York City and musings

During my time in New York City, there were many amusing situations I ended up in. A few of the best are listed below!

1. Being answered in Spanish on a number of occasions, due to my mildly-Scottish accent being misinterpreted for someone who was unable to actually converse in English. This led some to the conclusion that I was, in fact, Mexican.

2. If you say you’re from Scotland, every man and his dog is also from Scotland. They’re Scottish, their friends are Scottish and their pets are most likely descended from the Scots too.

3. A kind woman at the counter in a department store had a guessing game with her colleagues as to where my accent was from. Answers included: “North Canada? Like, the Rockies?” “Ireland! It’s got to be Ireland”, amongst many others.

4. There is a wonderful woman who stands just outside the Manhattan exit doors of the Staten Island Ferry terminal every day, shouting various messages of cheer, such as ‘HAPPY TUESDAY YOU WONDERFUL, BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE!’ If you ever need cheering up, I’d suggest you go there!

5. People sing outside the subway station, inside the subway station, on the subway platform and inside the subway train; some sing well, others not so much. Nevertheless, it’s entertaining - one that sticks in my mind is an elderly gentleman singing a unique version of ‘Going Up The Country’ by Canned Heat - featuring his voice as the panpipes!
6. Visiting the ‘Friends’ building is no sole event; there are many fans hanging around at any given time to take pictures, and you’ll likely make a new ‘friend’ whilst you’re there! Here’s my picture.

7. When I told a friendly lady in the supermarket that I was from Scotland, she informed me she “loved Ireland in the Spring time!”
4. General Assembly Week & Start of Internship

Somehow unknowingly, I managed to set my starting date at the United Nations on the same day as the beginning of the annual General Assembly. It was a scorching hot day, and my first task was to get my UN Grounds Pass. After managing to get into the cordoned-off streets after a few minor disputes with an NYPD Police Officer, unbeknown to me, a seven-and-a-half hour queue waited ahead. Despite the sore feet, the slight sunburn (oh pasty skin!) and the media taking endless photos, it was a successful day! Here’s why:

1. I made a like-minded friend in the queue, who offered me some of her bagel. She worked as an assistant for a staff member in the Japanese Mission to the United Nations.

2. I befriended the Director of International and Foreign Relations for the Government of the Cook Islands. She informed me about the Cook Islands’ relationship with New Zealand and their unique position in the United Nations as a result. Furthermore, their Prime Minister then came over and had a chat! How exciting!

3. I had a colourful debate with a gentleman from Canada about Scottish Independence, and gained some insight into the situation over there regarding an independent Quebec.

4. After all of the queuing and at around quarter to seven in the evening, there was light at the end of the tunnel and my little group went their separate ways to get their UN Grounds Passes. We all wished each other well for ‘life after the line’ and finally, I received my pass!

Finally, on day two, I was able to enter the United Nations Headquarters with my
new, shiny pass. However, there were a few minor issues (which turned out to be positives) at the beginning of the day. Word had got around to the guards that interns were not to be allowed in that day; higher security risks meant only essential staff should be at work. This however was just misinformation and after an hour or so of waiting outside at the checkpoint, I was told I was able to go in. A fellow intern tapped me on the shoulder just as I was about to head through the security checks to inform me that ‘my Prime Minister’ was behind us. He was correct, David Cameron was there, surrounded by paparazzi up until the security entrance, standing behind us whilst he waited to get to the General Assembly building. I felt rather overwhelmed at this, but he got ushered through very quickly. At this moment, an intern from Norway squealed as she realised that her Prime Minister was coming through as well.

After just about enough excitement for one day, I arrived at the twenty-second floor ready to start my first day of the internship. I was introduced to various different members of staff, and spent most of my day with Eiko Ikegaya and Heather Belrose, both of whom were incredibly helpful in my settling-in period in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), where I was to be based during the length of my internship. I was given my desk, which I quickly personalised and that same afternoon I was given my first task; writing a report on staff joining and leaving the team at DPKO according to guidelines set out by the Secretary General. I felt very privileged to be trusted with this documentation and it helped me learn a lot about how the UN worked regarding the setup of the teams and how
and why people are working on a certain project at any one time.

I was sat not far away from one other intern, and another intern also joined us soon after. We enjoyed each other’s company and often helped one another out if the need arose. The view from my desk was also nothing short of spectacular!
The Work Ahead and the Work Environment

There is a lot to mention regards the work which I was involved in during my internship. Firstly, the work was varied; from French translation work to flowcharts for how to find a new member of staff, there was always something to get on with. Various members of staff would approach me with tasks they needed done and I felt flattered that they had the confidence in me to carry them out.

I particularly enjoyed the French translations I did for the African Mission. Various documents needed translated within a short timeframe for a meeting which was to be held the following week. Firstly, it kept up and helped me to consolidate upon the work I’d been training to do at University and secondly, it was very insightful to read about the work being done within the African Mission at the time.

My work desk consisted of a computer and chair, a filing cabinet and an office phone. There were plenty of resources at my disposal including the United Nations library, a room full of stationary, printers, scanners and reports from the UN Security Council meetings and General Assemblies.

The office in which I worked was very akin to any other office I’d ever been in, making me feel at ease. Staff members were well acquainted with one another and everyone was incredibly friendly to me. There was a kitchen which we could use to prepare food (vague memories of the smell of burnt toast are coming back to me!), and there was a general aura of positivity throughout the office at all times. Everyone was so welcoming and made me feel like one of the team.
The work environment was also incredibly fast paced; it is evident that the full-time members of staff at the UN work industriously and push themselves to the limits of their capabilities for the sake of others. Weekly meetings were held during which we were all invited to give our opinions on certain events, whilst one or more people were nominated to give a report on the work they’d been doing over the last few weeks. Being able to attend those meetings gave a true insight into the sheer amount of work that our small department alone in the UN do.

Some of my colleagues knew, and remember Fiona Watson. They told me of her energetic spirit and her tireless dedication and commitment to helping others. They told me she was kind and courageous. The biggest honour of the internship has to be representing Fiona’s legacy; her work, her life and her inspiration. I felt incredibly lucky to hear from those who knew her tell me her story.
Reflection and Thanks

Reflecting upon my time as an intern for the UN in New York, the overwhelming feeling is that I learnt an incredible amount whilst there. Not only did I get a truly unique insight into the every day life of a UN Peacekeeper, I learnt that no matter who you are or where you are from, you’re able to make a difference to someone’s life; be it big or small. The United Nations is a truly inclusive organisation, seeking to hear everyone’s views and opinions in order to go forward. I also learnt a lot about the ‘City That Never Sleeps’ and its inhabitants. I saw the finishing touches of the Freedom Tower (One World Trade Center) being completed, a beautiful-standing reminder of the resilience of New Yorkers and their ability to continue on with life; never beaten.

I’d like to take this opportunity to thank those who helped me before, during and after my internship. Firstly I’d like to give a massive thank you to Pontus Molin, Eiko Ikegaya and Heather Belrose from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for supporting me and keeping me right throughout my internship. I’d like to thank my family and friends for their continued support and for taking phone calls very late at night due to the time difference. I’d like to thank all of the previous interns who gave me advice and tips regarding the internship. Finally I’d like to dedicate my biggest thank you to the Watson family, for allowing me to gain such experience and for continuing this invaluable internship to Heriot-Watt University languages students for many years; held in very high regard throughout our degree.