In review of the time that I spent in Chicago for my internship at United Cerebral Palsy, I know that there was nothing that could have prepared me for this internship. While the classes that I have taken at Monmouth College to fulfill my Public Relations major have been helpful and allowed me to think in new and different ways, I have found that experience is one of the most important ways to learn about something. I have learned a lot about special event planning for non-for-profit organizations, but I know that I will need to learn new daily routines and tasks for another organization or company upon taking my first job out of college. Certain classes, concepts, and projects prepared me for my internship in which I was able to learn a great deal about what it takes to facilitate special event planning for non-for-profit organizations.

All of my classes at Monmouth College have prepared me to write. Specifically, Writing for the Media helped me for my internship. One of my responsibilities was to write articles and format the organization’s quarterly newsletter, Grapevine. For this project, I was required to exercise my skills developed in the class. In taking Writing for the Media, I learned how to work on deadlines to produce interesting and concise material that would appeal to the intended audience. For the Grapevine, I had to write articles that would appeal to the board members and friends of United Cerebral Palsy. The audience should not hear anything sad or negative about the company that they are so dedicated in supporting, they need to hear the success of the events. Also, since the audience is made up of those that are volunteers at the events, they want to see their own
pictures (helping at events) and read about the new babies being born, engagements, and weddings for staff and supporters. The tone that I used for this newsletter was very positive.

I also had the project of writing a biography about the Women’s Board Scholarship Winner for the company website. For this project, I reflected back to my workshop with the Monmouth College Student Website and the tips and instructions from Susan Savage. I felt confident in taking on the task and was able to write a factual and interesting biography about the scholarship winner. These two writing assignments prove that I did meet my learning objective/goal: to construct effective oral and written messages.

The two written projects do not exactly reflect my ability to construct effective oral messages; however, I also had the opportunity to use skills learned in Advanced Public Speaking and other Communication classes. Throughout my internship, my responsibilities required me to call volunteers for events or simply thank volunteers and get their information after an event. I found that tone was important in making phone calls to get volunteers. To be specific, I did not want to sound disappointed that they could not volunteer for an event, but instead, thank them for all of the other times they have volunteered for UCP. I needed to keep in mind that they would probably be called several more times for future events. Communication classes that I have taken enabled me to call with confidence and professionalism.

Understanding the formative role that communication plays in the development of non-profit organizations was another learning objective that I had for the internship. I feel that I did learn a lot about the way communication is used in non-profit organizations.
For example, there is a certain tone that must be used in constructing any sort of message due to the type of organization that it is. The donations of time, money, and materials from people and businesses are what keep the non-for-profit organizations in existence. Therefore, the communication held between the benefactors and UCP must be of a gracious and thankful tone at all times. I noticed the amount of thank you letters that were sent out and the tone used in each of them. It is so important to recognize the benefactors because it influences them to support the organization in the future.

Things that I learned in *Interpersonal* and *Small Group Communication* helped me a great deal in my internship. While I was not involved in any conflicts, I could easily identify conflicts in the workplace and what were causing them: the lack of communication. Several problems arose during and after the move from one office building to the next space. I realized that the problems were due to a lack of communication between employees. For example, new letterhead and envelopes needed to be ordered in time of arrival to the new building, as there would be an address change. One person thought that another would be in charge of taking care of it, while she was waiting on approval from another person. In conclusion, the letterhead and envelopes had not been ordered and there was a problem since the old stationary was thrown away. If everyone had been communicating properly, one person could have been responsible for ordering, and the letterhead would have been ready. However, no one took initiative and there was a problem.

Another instance caused by poor communication was about lost picture collages. There were two sports figure collages that were sold at the last auction that had not been picked up yet. Since we could not find them after the move, we assumed they had been...
stolen. However, I learned that it is important to wait before dealing with the situation in case it works itself out. Later, we found out that the pictures were taken to another office in hopes that the owner would pick them up. Unfortunately, they failed to communicate and the purchaser was going to come to the downtown office that day to pick up the pictures. I realized that it was good that we did not deal with the situation immediately or we would have ordered new pictures to replace them and worried the owner by telling him that his ($1,200) pictures had been stolen.

I was called on to use my problem-solving skills when I was unable to get enough volunteers for the Casino Night. I had exhausted the list of possible volunteers when I realized I needed to try something else. I began researching on the Internet until I found the Rockford Charitable Games Association. I called the manager of the company and was able to use some of their dealers for our event. He was willing to help us in hopes that in the future we would do events with their gaming association. After nearly one hundred calls and denials, we were able to still have the Casino Night.

Since there were only a few people working in Development for United Cerebral Palsy, my communication skills for interpersonal relationships and small groups were very useful. I found that it is important to remain professional even though relationships develop at work. For example, Christy and Kathy were supposed to share a much smaller office in the new building. However, they decided that it would be a better working environment if Kathy worked at a cubicle and Christy used the office. While this was a difficult decision to make, they two of them thought it out carefully and did not let their pride or selfishness stand in the way of what would be the most productive working environment. Both of the women honestly stated what they would prefer and it resulted in
a situation that pleased them both. This situation taught me importance of being honest because every employee is entitled to their own opinion in regards to the working environment.

Throughout my internship, I had the opportunity to work with several forms of technology. I feel that working with technology that I was unfamiliar with helped me to become flexible and hopefully more employable with the added experience. One of the more simple things that I had to adapt to was working on a Mac computer. I had little experience working with a Mac so that was new and a little difficult at first, but it was not long until I was familiar with it and it was easy to find files that I needed on the shared drive. A few days into my internship I needed to send out thank you letters to volunteers from an event and I had to work with mail merge and update databases of addresses. These were tasks that I had done before, but certainly something that I did not do regularly. In accomplishing these tasks, I became more familiar with the technology and eventually quite confident. Some other more complex software that I worked with include Snap, the event-planning program, and Quark, a design program for newsletters. After getting to know the program, daily I was entering in reservations for the upcoming Brickhouse Event and managing the online reservations. I realized that there is a long process in making sure the reservation is correctly entered and the payment is sent to accounting. I used Quark when working on Grapevine, the company’s newsletter. Not only was I learning how to use new software, but I also learned to be adaptive and flexible to new forms of technology.

On several occasions, I was asked to produce an appropriate, effective, professional appearing message, my last learning objective for this internship. I will use
an “ask” letter that I wrote to Lance Armstrong for this objective. I felt prepared and knowledgeable in doing this sort of task after the assignments I had in Public Relations class. The Women’s Board at United Cerebral Palsy helps with the auction at one of the big events and a board member suggested that UCP ask Lance Armstrong for one of his jerseys to auction at the event and I was responsible for writing the letter. I made sure to congratulate him on his win at the Tour de France, state UCP’s mission, and then indicate what the letter was seeking. It is yet to be determined how effective this message was, but I was able to achieve a professional look by printing it on the letterhead with the Women’s Board signatures at the bottom. My goal was to make it persuasive and professional appearing.

Above all, I gained experience in working for a non-for-profit organization. I feel that actual, hands-on experience is incredibly valuable and it helped me to daily learn about the responsibilities of being an event planner in development. I was able to accomplish many goals and objectives by applying concepts and skills that I have learned and developed in my Public Relations and Communication classes at Monmouth College. Not only have I gained from the experience, but I can now identify my strengths and weaknesses in event planning.