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Work Based Learning

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Internships are a key part of academic learning, bridging the gap between classroom theory and real-world practice. Throughout my internship with the Sheriff's Department and in the probation field, I have had the opportunity to observe law enforcement professionals, learn the nuances of probation practices, and reflect on how these experiences have shaped my personal and professional goals. This reflection explores the process I followed, the skills I gained, the challenges I faced, and how my experiences have impacted my future career aspirations. By analyzing the various roles I encountered and the lessons I learned, I have a better understanding of myself as both a learner and a future professional.

During my internship, my routine varied, depending on the day's assignments and the officers or professionals I was working with. Some days involved ride-alongs, where I shadowed officers on their daily rounds, such as delivering legal papers during home visits. I also spent a considerable amount of time with probation officers, sitting in on juvenile and adult intake processes, and observing how probation cases are handled. I had the opportunity to witness how probation officers manage their caseloads, visit homes, and interact with offenders. Although the days sometimes felt repetitive, with paperwork and document filing being common tasks, there were still moments of real learning, especially when I was able to observe the emotional complexities that come with managing probation cases. While my internship didn't always unfold as I had initially planned, I learned that flexibility is crucial in law enforcement.

Some days were quieter, like sitting in with dispatchers, where calls weren't as frequent, while other days were more intense, especially when I observed juvenile cases. My learning goal for the semester was to better understand the multifaceted nature of probation work. I aimed to learn how probation officers handle various situations—whether juvenile offenders, substance abuse cases, or more serious offenses. My weekly observations of different aspects of law enforcement and probation helped me develop a well-rounded understanding of the field.

The internship was definitely a learning stretch for me, especially when it came to understanding the emotional aspects of law enforcement. I learned a great deal about the paperwork involved in probation work, including case documentation and the processes for home visits and offender check-ins. Additionally, observing probation officers interact with juveniles taught me about the patience and empathy required in this field. For instance, I witnessed an intake session with a juvenile offender, and while I was just an observer, the emotional weight of the situation was hard to ignore. It was difficult to watch the expressions of the family members change, and it made me realize how challenging the job can be. Through these experiences, I learned that I am more sensitive to emotional situations than I had originally thought, and that I would need to develop emotional resilience if I were to pursue a career in this field. I also learned how important it is to remain professional and balanced, even when facing tough situations. My community supervisor and colleagues were instrumental in guiding me through these emotional complexities. They offered support, insight, and advice about how to handle sensitive cases, and their mentorship allowed me to approach each situation with a more open, understanding perspective.

The hardest part of my internship was dealing with the emotional weight of the job. Many of the cases I witnessed, especially those involving juveniles, were emotionally charged and

often left me feeling drained. For example, one of the most challenging experiences was sitting in on a juvenile intake session. It was heart-wrenching to see the impact on the family, especially knowing that the juvenile offender would need to go through a lengthy probation process. It was difficult to witness these moments, and I struggled to process the emotional toll it took on both the offenders and their families. I overcame these challenges by leaning on my supervisors and colleagues for support. They reminded me that emotional resilience is key in this field and that understanding and empathy are essential when dealing with such sensitive situations. If I could do anything over again, I would spend more time preparing myself emotionally for the challenges of dealing with tough cases. For other students preparing for an internship in this field, my advice would be to come in with an open mind, be ready for emotional challenges, and be willing to learn from each situation, no matter how difficult it may be.

This internship experience has had a profound impact on my future career aspirations. Although I initially thought I wanted to pursue a career as a probation officer, I now realize that there are certain aspects of the job that don't align with my interests, such as the emotional burden of handling sensitive cases like juvenile intakes. However, my exposure to the field has sparked an interest in exploring other areas of law enforcement and criminal justice, such as victim advocacy or social work, where I can still contribute to helping individuals without being directly involved in enforcement. The experience also made me more aware of the challenges faced by those in the criminal justice system, particularly with regard to mental health and substance abuse issues. As I continue my studies, I plan to explore these areas further to understand how professionals in law enforcement and probation can better address these issues. My questions now center around how to improve rehabilitation efforts and provide better support for offenders, particularly juveniles. This internship has shaped my career goals by encouraging me to think critically about how I can make a positive impact in the criminal justice system, even if it's in a different role than I initially expected.

On a personal level, this internship has made me more empathetic and aware of the struggles faced by individuals within the criminal justice system. One unique experience that impacted me was seeing the dedication and emotional strength required by probation officers to manage their caseloads, especially when dealing with young offenders. The emotional toll was palpable, and I began to appreciate the importance of self-care and support systems for those working in this field. I am most proud of how I was able to process difficult situations, such as the juvenile intake cases, and maintain my composure and professionalism. It wasn't easy, but I was able to manage the emotional weight of the experience and learn how important it is to strike a balance between empathy and professionalism. I could have used more emotional support throughout the process, especially when dealing with tough cases. Reflecting on these experiences, I have gained a greater understanding of myself as a learner, worker, and future professional.

In conclusion, my internship at the Sheriff's Department and in the probation field has been a transformative experience, providing me with valuable insights into law enforcement, probation, and the emotional complexities of working with offenders. The experiences I've had—from observing probation officers handle juvenile cases to seeing the dedication of dispatchers and officers—have deepened my understanding of the criminal justice system. Although I've encountered challenges, I've learned important lessons about emotional resilience, empathy, and professionalism. Moving forward, I am more confident in my ability to make thoughtful decisions about my career path, and I'm excited to continue exploring ways I can contribute to the field of criminal justice.