

A First Year's Experience as an Official Development Assistant Intern

Fresh off the plane from Jamaica and newly arrived in Leicester, Akilah Maxwell was in search of a familiar setting outside of academic research that related to her previous work in national development and projects. Akilah's passions encouraged her to sign up for the Official Development Assistant (ODA) internship at the University of Leicester between January and April 2017. This was an eye-opening experience that built on her knowledge of national development, but it also revealed how Akilah could use her existing project and programme experiences in her PhD research. Below Akilah shares a first hand account of some of the lessons she learnt along the way and how they shaped her journey as a researcher.

Sharing your problems can help you get a clearer picture of your project.

During my internship I assisted in the organisation of an ODA conference in Kenya which brought together several representatives from various African universities to discuss issues related to research and integration of their objectives into realistic outcomes. As representatives from each country discussed their programme issues, it became obvious that they all possessed similar problems at one point or another. This allowed us to build on our knowledge as individuals to develop new solutions that will benefit future programmes and collaborations. Talking about project struggles with other researchers can help to reframe and rethink problems in implementing a project.



Outside of the hotel where the conference was held.

Know how to pitch your project suitably to your target audience

All projects are developed for a specific purpose, but sometimes academic researchers can get caught up in sharing the need for the project without discussing the potential impact. While it is important to identify why the project is necessary, understanding the potential impact will enhance potential investment in the research project. Tactics include knowing the financial impact or the outcomes of a project to help shape your pitch to the potential supporters of the project.

Thinking about the future of research and media

PhD projects have a period in which they are implemented and finalised, leading to very few people planning for the completion phase. Research is constantly evolving, it is not only changed by new discoveries and the creation of knowledge, but by the utilisation of media which places information at everyone's fingertips. Future academics may be required to create communication strategies to share future discoveries with the wider academic community. This was one of the main issues researchers at the conference in Kenya were struggling with, specifically the creation of appropriate communication strategies that serve to relay their message to the wider public. Creating academic social media pages and building



Group photo of conference attendees.

followers from the start of your research as a new academic may serve to bring research discoveries into the everyday life of the wider population. Projects are not just for researchers or academics, they create ideas and discoveries that should be shared with everyone. Always plan for ways to get your knowledge out there.

Final Thoughts

The ODA internship provided me with the opportunity to reconsider my project from the perspective of a career researcher and not just as a PhD student. It provided me with useful practical tips that have served in developing my understanding of the processes involved in producing impactful research that can affect the lives of readers. Research is a complicated and daunting experience in which successes and failures rest on a variety of moving parts that need to be monitored. Networking with fellow researchers from various different fields helped me to reflect on their failures and successes and to think about what it will mean to be a researcher at the end of my PhD.

**For information on internships please contact:
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