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Internship was valuable

By **MAUREEN O'NEILL**
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Sometimes I get looks from my friends when I tell them I work for a health care management company.

"What's the name of the company?"

"Continuum Health Alliance."

The blank stares are then followed by the inevitable question: "So . . . what does that have to do with your major?"

I major in international relations (IR) at Tufts University. Summers for IR majors could include working for a nonprofit group, conducting research with a professor on campus, or trying to obtain a coveted internship in the office of a congressman in Washington, D.C. Several of my friends are currently interning on the Hill for various senators. When they tell me that they work in the office of Senator So-and-So, my initial reaction is "Wow; that must be such an experience."

But when I ask what exactly they do in the office, I find out that my fellow majors — intelligent and hard-working as they are — are mainly making coffee and

running errands, without pay.

At Continuum Health Alliance, my internship has been a far cry from sending faxes and answering telephones. I spent my summer conducting research, learning how to read annual reports, and synthesizing data which provided input for ongoing company initiatives. Not only did I use my analytical skills, but I had the opportunity to present some of my findings to senior management. Who else among my fellow students can say that they made presentations in front of the CEO and actually helped create dialogue within the company they work for? At Continuum, I was not just an intern; I was a member of the team.

Although medical practice management may not have any direct bearing on the study of international relations, I learned invaluable lessons about how to "get things done," to put it simply.

As an intern in the marketing department, I discovered that a clean appearance and a pleasant, but firm demeanor can greatly influence negotiations with even the most stubborn of clients (this les-

son will come in handy if I happen to become the ambassador to a hostile country one day).

My experience also taught me that thorough research and the confidence that comes with being prepared will get a person through any presentation, no matter how uneasy they feel in front of a crowd (if I go into politics, I most certainly will need to be comfortable with public speaking).

Most importantly, I learned that nothing gets accomplished by refusing to cooperate or compromise; working within the system is better than tearing it down. This type of education cannot be taught in a classroom, but only obtained through real-world experience.

My internship at Continuum may not look as flashy on a resume as one for a politician, but I am confident that my future employer will appreciate the work and dedication I placed in my job.

And, unlike my friends, I actually have a paycheck to show for it.

The writer is a Cherry Hill resident and a student at Tufts University.