

Geointeresting Podcast Transcript

What is it like to be an intern at NGA?

September 1, 2016

Welcome to Geointeresting, presented by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. We sat down with NGA interns Brooke and Garrett, as well as Liz Vazquez, student programs manager at NGA's Campus East, to discuss their experiences and provide tips on applying to the program. Stay tuned for Geointeresting!

NGA: Let's start by having you guys introduce yourselves: your name, what university you attend, what year you're in and what your major is.

Brooke: OK, so I'm Brooke, and I'm majoring in English. I'm getting my MA in English at the University of Maryland, College Park, and I'll be entering my second year of my program

Garrett: My name is Garrett. I'm entering my junior year at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, and I am studying cyber intelligence and security.

NGA: And what made you want to apply to NGA for an internship?

Brooke: So all my other previous summer jobs have been lifeguarding, and I really wanted a "big kid" job. That's what made me want to apply.

Garrett: My school — a lot of the professors there are former FBI [and] former CIA, and they really got me interested in the IC, so I wanted to hop in there and see what it was all about.

NGA: Cool! Can you describe the application process a little bit and anything you did or included in your application that you thought made yourself stand out?

Brooke: I know my office told me that they had picked me because I already had two previous internships, and they said that that really helped; and they were local internships that I worked at, so this was the biggest one I had done so far, but it really impressed them.

Garrett: Cyber intelligence and security kind of lends itself to government work, so definitely, the classes I've taken so far in my college career. My office has said that, that was a big part of why picking me. Originally, I was going to be an analyst, and then I ended up getting moved to data science, probably because I put a lot of computer skills on my application.

NGA: Did you like that move?

Garrett: It's been interesting, but I've definitely enjoyed it so far.

NGA: Good! Because I know a lot of interns, they — I think they get put in a maybe a different division than they think they would more like to be aligned to, but then they end up learning different skills, and that would probably help them. Did you have to interview?



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Brooke: Yes. It was just an interesting experience because it was over the phone, even though I wasn't that far away — I wasn't in St. Louis or anything. But I just remember normal interviewing skills are good to have. Maybe practicing before, if you can do that at school, and then when you know the interviews are coming. Because I remember being off base on one, and I didn't get that; I got three different interviews, and of course, you get one job, but one interview wasn't as good as the others.

Liz: So my name is Liz Vazquez, and I'm one of the co-managers for the student programs here at NCE. Moving forward, we've actually streamlined the interviewing process. You guys didn't have to go through it, but [for] anybody who's going to be applying for next summer, we've actually done video interviews. So we'll send you some questions, and you don't see the questions ahead of time. You'll get an email: Hey, this is your applicant login, blah, blah, blah. Then, you'll see your questions, and you get about — depending on how many — I think it's three minutes to answer them, and you video record yourself, and then the hiring managers will see that.

Garrett: That's interesting.

NGA: Oh I like [that], that's cool.

Liz: So we're not doing phone interviews anymore. We're not doing in-person interviews, unless there's a follow-up.

NGA: Can you provide an overview of your job here at NGA? What are some of the things you do every day?

Brooke: OK, so the past two summers I worked in the Office of Diversity, and I wrote a lot of articles about diversity events coming up and just diversity education, and now I'm in a different office, and I have pretty much just done a survey for them the whole year — creating the survey, and I'm analyzing the results, so this is totally different.

Garrett: So right now, I'm a data scientist, so I get to play with a lot of the cool programs and toys that we have around here and really big excel sheets. So basically, what I'll do pretty much every day is if I'm not coding or working in some geospatial-analysis program, I'm thinking about how I'm going to code this or how I'm going to put this into a geospatial-analysis program, so it definitely keeps me busy throughout the day.

NGA: OK, cool. What's been one of the most fun or interesting thing you've done during your internships here?

Brooke: They had a national women's summit, something like that, and I went and — diversity is my undergraduate major's pretty much big focus on, so I really like [it]. And hearing the deputy director tell her life story was really cool [and] interesting.

Garrett: So I don't know if this answer is cheating, but the opportunities, specifically, optional training. For instance, a couple of weeks ago, my office more or less paid me to go do a three-day training course up in D.C. on Python, which is a coding language for those who don't know.

So for three days, I got to go get a bunch of free food [and] learn how to code some more, and I was paid for it, which was pretty exciting.

NGA: What advice would you give students, especially you Garrett, who are already in a program sort of geared towards the IC? What kind of advice would you give them who are considering a job here at NGA or at another intelligence-community agency?

Garrett: First off, keep your nose clean. I've had plenty of friends from school who haven't made their internship with the FBI or the CIA because of one dumb thing they did three years ago. So that would definitely be the first bit of advice.

NGA: Especially with their initiative thinking about checking social media accounts now for background investigation, you think?

Garrett: Yes, I've actually started going through my Facebook a little bit each day and just removing some of those older posts.

NGA: Any last tips you want to give to people? I mean, was there anything hard about the application? Confusing?

Garrett: I had a friend from school also apply here, and she got an internship as well. Our biggest challenge was finding housing. Partly because we waited a little longer than we should, but mostly because there's nothing for students in D.C. If you think you're going to be working in the IC, specifically, in the D.C. area, start looking for housing as early as possible, and pretty much take whatever that you can.

Liz: And we got duly noted on that, and we are working on an initiative to see. I forgot the name, but it's a name that makes — like if an employee could opt in if they have room to house an intern. So we are definitely working on it. We are looking at other options as well; forming some partnerships with local universities and making sure that we do get the word out to hold spaces for us because I know a lot of the times, depending on when the interns clear, by the time they get here, everything might be full. So working on that to get a reservation. Like, "Hey, can you hold this for us for a certain amount of time?" and then we could help guys with that.

Garrett: That would be fantastic.

Liz: So we're working on it We just wanted to let you guys know that we heard you, and we are working on it.

NGA: Yes, that would be helpful, especially in this area. But also, it's going to be at NCW out west as well.

Liz: Right. So we're working both NCE and NCW.

Brooke: Good.

NGA: Cool, thanks guys.



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Approved for public release: 16-579

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