Bridging the Gap between Classroom and Career: A 15-week Internship

An Honors Thesis

by

Julia K. Sontag

Thesis Advisor
Dr. Matthew Harber

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 2008
Abstract

The final semester for a Ball State University Exercise Science student is spent completing a 12-credit hour internship. The internship enables a student to work for a minimum of 540 clock hours at a facility which includes programs such as wellness, employee fitness, and sports medicine. I chose to complete my internship at Wellbridge Athletic Club and Spa in St. Louis, Missouri, in the personal training department. My time spent at Wellbridge Athletic Club and Spa was the culmination of my college education and a crucial time in my life. Not everyone gets the opportunity to complete a semester-long internship, and I would like to share my experience with others. In a collection of weekly journals and a final reflection, I discuss new learning experiences, specific jobs performed, and my perception of involvement at Wellbridge Athletic Club and Spa. I evaluate my learning experiences and also reflect on my personal development.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Matthew Harber for advising me throughout this project. He offered great suggestions and feedback, and his help is much appreciated.

I would also like to thank Dr. James Ruebel for his help and support during the brainstorming and completion of this project.
Weekly Journals

Week 1
January 7- January 13, 2008
Hours completed this week: 36

This week at Wellbridge I observed assessments and evaluations for new members of the club. Every new member receives a complimentary fitness assessment with a certified personal trainer. Measurements including resting blood pressure, resting heart rate, body composition, and flexibility are obtained during this initial meeting. I also observed personal training sessions, cleaned equipment on the fitness floor, and checked the chemicals in the pool. There is a lot of equipment at the club that I have never seen before, so I learned how each piece is used and why it is used. I learned what a postural assessment entails and how it affects a client's exercise program. I met a lot of new people this week, and everyone was friendly and welcoming. Wellbridge is a very different atmosphere from Ball State's fitness room, a place where I spent a majority of my time the past three and a half years. The average age of a Wellbridge member is 42, and the needs and desires of the members here are unique to each individual.

I am pleased with the first week of my internship. It was helpful to observe different trainers during complimentary assessments and personal training sessions because they all have their own backgrounds and personal styles. Some are experts in injury prevention, while others have experience in prenatal exercise. Everyone has been friendly and willing to answer any questions I have. This past Thursday night I closed the
entire building with one other person, and that was an excellent experience for me. I already feel like I am part of the staff team here, and the management trusts me to take on real responsibilities. I do not feel like I am getting in the way, but rather, I am helping out. Wellbridge is a beautiful and upscale facility, and I am happy to be interning here.

Week 2
January 14- January 20, 2008
Hours completed this week: 38

This week I observed more member assessments and personal training sessions. I am learning a lot during the member assessments, such as what questions to ask and how to get to know the client. I am also learning more about nutrition, as some of the trainers have an impressive amount of knowledge on the topic. This week I was able to take two women through a strength training workout and show them some exercises they had never seen before.

The two women I trained were a bit of a challenge to instruct. All they seemed to want to do was gossip about television and politics, and it was difficult to keep them focused on form, technique, and breathing. For example, one of the women was shifting her weight forward during a squat exercise, creating unnecessary pressure on her knees. When I corrected her during that particular movement, she rolled her eyes as if I was asking too much out of her. It was a bit frustrating but by the end of the workout, the two women were having fun and working hard. I could tell that they became more comfortable with me as the hour progressed. They said that the time went by faster than
usual and that they got a great workout. This experience taught me that some clients require more motivation, and patience, than others.

Week 3
January 21- January 27, 2008
Hours completed this week: 40

This week I observed more member assessments and personal training sessions. I also helped with inventory, assisting my supervisor in deciding what equipment the club needs and can afford. I met with a personal trainer and learned about her specialty, Muscle Activation Techniques, which focuses on restoring body alignment to improve function and relieve pain. She was passionate about her practice and made sure that I understood what it entailed. I also sat in on a nutritional assessment with the Registered Dietician and a new member at Wellbridge, which was quite interesting. I attended a sales seminar with the administration staff and learned about getting people interested in joining the gym, as well as retaining them.

This week was a bit more exciting than the first two weeks. My supervisor had a large budget to spend on new equipment, so we spent a lot of time looking through catalogs to determine what would be best for the facility. I was also able to observe a nutritional assessment. The client was a young adult about fifteen pounds overweight, yet ate healthy, small-portioned meals and exercised regularly. It will be interesting to see what the Dietician will advise for her.
I learned a lot this week, and I do not hesitate to ask questions if I need clarification of any kind. I have made an effort to have a conversation with each of the twenty personal trainers to get to know everyone’s personality, interests, and aspirations. I have also built friendships with some of the members here, and continue to learn more regarding their personalities and workout styles. I have had great learning experiences thus far, and I am enjoying my time at Wellbridge.

Week 4
January 28- February 3, 2008
Hours completed this week: 37

This week I observed and participated in a few group exercise classes. I learned how the instructors interacted with their classes, some of them containing up to thirty people. I also learned about PTonthenet.com, a website Wellbridge trainers must go to every month to read certain articles. This month the article explored women and strength training, and it provided interesting and valuable information. Other than that, I have just been helping out in any way that I can and shadowing more client assessments.

The client assessments have been very helpful to observe. Some trainers go in-depth with their clients, while others do not. Some explain to the clients the significance of measurements such as blood pressure, body composition, and flexibility, while others just hurry through and do not give the client any information. I am realizing how important it is for the clients to know what is going on during their initial assessments, and I will make sure to be thorough once I start doing assessments on my own. I think it
truly benefits the client to have real meaning behind the numbers and to gain as much knowledge as possible.

**Week 5**

February 4- February 10, 2008

Hours completed this week: 35

This week I learned a lot about equipment maintenance. I learned how long equipment typically lasts, such as treadmills and strength training equipment. I also learned how many pieces of equipment there should be, according to the number of active members. My supervisor taught me the importance of equipment layout, organization, and space conservation. Wellbridge is constantly purchasing new equipment in order to meet the needs of its members. A gym must keep their members happy if they expect retention and to remain in business. There are dozens of health clubs in St. Louis, and I now understand that it takes a knowledgeable and dedicated staff for a club to stand above the rest. I have learned valuable information about budgeting and business this week, and have seen a great variety of people who all work together to make Wellbridge a successful business.
Week 6

February 11 - February 17, 2008

Hours completed this week: 10

This week was cut short for me because I had the flu. My supervisor was very understanding and did not want me to come in until I felt 100% healthy. She wanted me to feel better and also wanted to keep Wellbridge free of any contamination. It was a pretty depressing week for me, but I did manage to work a couple days. One of the days I opened the building, which was a first for me. It was exciting to be responsible for the key and for the opening of the facility, and everything went smoothly. This weekend I attended the 2008 St. Louis Regional Sports Performance Clinic. Other trainers from Wellbridge went with me, and we attended lectures from the St. Louis Rams head strength and conditioning coach, the University of Missouri strength and conditioning staff, and 2005 United States Marathon Championships Runner-up Ben Rosario.

I was disappointed that I was sick this week, because I was supposed to meet with a trainer who has great skill and experience in stretching the body. He is always booked up with stretching appointments, and the members here seem to love him. He was going to show me some of the stretches he uses on his clients and teach me the pros and cons of each stretch. I had to miss this appointment due to my illness, so we have rescheduled for a later time.
Week 7

February 18- February 24, 2008

Hours completed this week: 40

This week was probably the best one for me so far. One of the trainers was unable to come in for his new member assessment, so I volunteered to take it. I met with the new member, assessed his resting pulse and blood pressure, body composition, and flexibility, and discussed his concerns and goals. I then wrote two strength training programs for him, and on Saturday we went through them together. I also closed the facility three nights this week.

It felt so great to take on more responsibility. The new member I met with was friendly and a great listener. I enjoyed getting to know him during our assessment, and he was very easy to work with. On Saturday we went through each exercise and determined the appropriate amount of weight to use. I also taught him proper form, technique, and breathing pattern during the exercises, and I made sure he felt comfortable with the equipment. It was a rewarding experience for me, and I felt comfortable and confident. Some of the personal trainers saw me working with the new client and afterwards told me I did a great job, which was gratifying to hear. I have noticed that members are getting to know me better, and as a result they feel more comfortable talking to me or asking me questions regarding their workouts. I can tell that I have made definite progress since Week 1.
Week 8

February 25- March 2, 2008

Hours completed this week: 27

This week we had a 3-hour training seminar regarding marketing, sales, and customer service which was required for all Wellbridge personal trainers. I also worked two shifts on the fitness floor and observed (and assisted with) three personal training sessions. One of the personal training sessions was particularly exciting. The client was highly motivated and in great physical condition, so the trainer and I were able to push her pretty hard. A lot of members at Wellbridge like to stay in their comfort zones while working out, yet we were able to challenge this client and have fun with her at the same time.

The training seminar we had this week was beneficial for me. We learned about approaching new members of the club and getting them interested in personal training. We also learned how to deal with objections to personal training, such as the commitment and financial issues. We practiced how to respond to different objections, and it was a great discussion. Some of the personal trainers at the seminar have been doing their job for decades, so I was interested to hear their input.
Week 9

March 3- March 9, 2008

Hours completed this week: 43

One of my internship requirements is to complete a final project. This week I did some research and decided to make a golf fitness newsletter for the club. The newsletter will contain information regarding cardiovascular exercise, strength training, and flexibility specific to a golfer. Many the members at Wellbridge are recreational and competitive golfers, so I concluded that this could benefit them. This week I also had an assessment with a new member, for whom I will be writing a strength training program.

I am somewhat nervous about training this new member because during our initial assessment, she told me she currently smokes half a pack of cigarettes a day. She told me that she was once a star basketball player, and now gets winded after a short jog down the court. We are going to have to take small steps to build her cardiovascular health, and I hope I can help her to quit smoking. Although I am nervous, I am also excited because she and I got along quite well during our first meeting. We have similar personalities, and I think we are going to have a fun time working together.
Week 10

March 10- March 16, 2008

Hours completed this week: 45

This was a busy week for me. I assessed three new members at the club and designed strength training programs for two of them. They seemed very grateful that I took the time to explain each exercise to them and that I listened to their questions and concerns. I also introduced them to interval training for their cardiovascular exercise. These clients are in their sixties, which was a new experience for me. I also had my stretching appointment with a trainer here this week. He spent time living in Japan and India and has learned many different techniques over the years, so he showed me some of his favorite stretches.

On Thursday I met with a trainer who is certified through the National Academy of Sports Medicine and specializes in corrective exercise. Corrective exercise focuses on improving musculoskeletal impairments and imbalances and can benefit almost everyone. Together we went through a postural assessment followed by an hour of therapeutic techniques and corrective exercises. I learned not only by listening to him, but also by feeling my body’s response to the movements. I gained a lot of valuable information this week and am fortunate to work with such knowledgeable trainers.
Week 11

March 17- March 23, 2008

Hours Completed this Week: 42

This was a slower week for me at Wellbridge. I was able to spend a lot of time working on my golf fitness newsletter, reading articles written by strength and conditioning coaches. I compiled a series of exercises that are designed to improve a golfer's strength, flexibility, balance, and power, and I will be including pictures and descriptions of these exercises in the newsletter. The final product should be completed by the end of the week, and once it is approved by management, I will make copies for members here at Wellbridge to take home with them.

I also worked two floor shifts and had a personal training appointment with one of the new members I met last week. We met for an hour and went through a strength training circuit. She had a variety of questions regarding the equipment, so I made sure to be thorough in my explanations. She was enthusiastic and eager to work hard, which made my job easier. We had fun working together, yet were efficient with our time. I am getting more comfortable training and communicating with clients, which is a great step forward for me.
Week 12

March 24- March 31, 2008

Hours completed this week: 41

On Saturday I attended a seminar entitled "Integrated Strength Training" with several other trainers from Wellbridge. The speaker was a professor and personal trainer from Alberta, Canada who specializes in human movement and functional physical training. He has authored numerous articles on human design and function, developed a series of performance videos, and created an athletic model for high performance training. The presentation was more of an interactive discussion, and he was a dynamic and efficient speaker. He encouraged us to ask questions and commended our participation. He also showed us a few strength exercises that are gentler on the joints, yet more effective for muscular development. The seminar lasted about four hours, and each of us went home with a packet containing all the information we had covered. This was a free event for all Wellbridge trainers, and I was privileged to have such a great educational experience.

Week 13

March 31- April 6, 2008

Hours completed this week: 34

On Tuesday I took part in a Health Fair at a financial business office. Wellbridge was in charge of a table that was called "Ask the Trainer", where employees from the
office could talk to us about fitness and health. I personally answered questions regarding endurance training and group exercise, and we distributed 3-day passes to the club.

I also trained a 65 year old man this week. We worked on his strength training regimen, and I taught him a series of stretches that he could do on his own. Working with this client was a bit of a challenge. He did not have the best control over his body, and it was difficult for me to teach him correct lifting and stretching form. His joints were very stiff, so his available range of motion was limited as well. Though this personal training session was challenging for me, I am glad I had the experience. I realize that I need to go out of my comfort zone so that I am able to work with a broader population in the fitness industry. I want to be able to train people of all ages and body types, and I will only accomplish this through experience and a willingness to learn more.

Week 14
April 7 - April 13, 2008

Hours completed this week: 36

This week was less eventful for me. I helped the administration staff with filing and payroll, and I worked two shifts on the fitness floor. Since this week was slower than usual, I took it upon myself to talk to trainers I work with and get to know them on a deeper level. I talked to them about personal training, education, certifications, jobs, and places to work in St. Louis. I received some great advice and learned a lot by talking to everyone. I feel like the people I work with genuinely care about me and want me to learn as much as I can. They had great input and were very helpful.
During one of my floor shifts, I met with an older gentleman who asked if I could take his post-exercise blood pressure. I took two readings, which were consistent, and discussed what blood pressure actually means. He said that he was very grateful that I took the time to do this, which gave me a sense of accomplishment. I valued the fact that he felt comfortable talking with me and was appreciative of my time.

Week 15
April 14- April 18, 2008
Hours completed this week: 36

This week I helped file personal training contracts and did inventory on equipment that needed repair. I also met with a trainer to review stretching of the hips and thighs. I learned a number of different ways to stretch the muscle groups, and he made sure I felt comfortable with all of them. This was a great learning experience for me, because many times when I am stretching a client, I find that I exert myself and can become physically fatigued. I need to be able to stretch multiple clients in one day, and come back the next day prepared to do it all over again. This is why I was shown multiple stretching techniques: while each stretch is effective, I need to choose the one that does not cause me physical exhaustion or discomfort.

This was the fifteenth and final week of my internship. My supervisor has offered me a position as a personal trainer and group exercise instructor. While I am grateful for the offer, I have decided to take another opportunity from a different company. I
discussed this with the administration staff at Wellbridge, and they told me that I am always welcome to come back.
Final Reflection

Throughout my 15-week internship at Wellbridge Athletic Club and Spa, I conducted new member evaluations consisting of a short interview and blood pressure, body composition, and flexibility assessments. I trained a variety of people and led them through strength training circuits. I worked the fitness floor and helped with member safety, facility cleanliness, and organization of equipment. I also spent time communicating and building relationships with the employees and members during slow times. I was responsible for opening and closing the facility, helped with the maintenance and ordering of exercise equipment, and learned about budgeting and equipment costs. I attended sales and marketing presentations and learned more about customer service. I also helped the administration staff with filing and booked personal training appointments using a computer software program.

My internship gave me excellent job experience. I practiced my assessment skills including blood pressure and body composition, and I now have more confidence in those areas. I gained a great amount of knowledge by observing and listening throughout the weeks. The trainers had various backgrounds, and I learned something new every time I spoke with one of them. The opportunity to work with clients from ages 18 to 80 was a great experience for me. Having the confidence and ability to work with people of all age groups will make me a more versatile trainer and valuable employee. Interacting with people of various personality types improved my communication and listening skills. I also learned a lot about facility management and maintenance, areas that were unfamiliar to me before my internship.
The best experience of all was building relationships with both co-workers and clients. These relationships nurtured my personal development. For the past 3½ years of my life, I have attended classes with people of my same age and lifestyle, worked with them, and even lived with them. Then, after moving back home to complete my internship, my environment changed. Suddenly I was surrounded by individuals two to four times my age and was living with two new roommates: Mom and Dad. Now, instead of discussing a test with a classmate, I was listening to a co-worker’s dilemma regarding her grandchildren. Because of this change of environment, as well as the experiences I had throughout my fifteen weeks at Wellbridge, I have developed into a self-confident young adult. I am comfortable communicating and interacting with a variety of people. I am eager to see what the future holds and what I can accomplish, not just in my career, but in life.
Cardio

Focus on the intensity of your cardiovascular exercise rather than the duration. Instead of a 60-minute walk, try a 30-minute combination of walking and jogging.

Experiment with the incline on a treadmill, speed on a stepper, or resistance on an elliptical or bike so that you work at both high and low intensities for at least 30 minutes.

Strength Training

Always pay special attention to form and technique while strength training. Keep your movements slow and controlled to challenge your muscles and reap the most benefits.

Inside you will find exercises tailored to the needs of a golfer. The number of sets and reps you do depends on your current fitness level:

Beginner: 1 set of 8 reps per exercise
Intermediate: 2 sets of 10 reps per exercise
Advanced: 2 sets of 12 reps per exercise

Flexibility

Make stretching an integral part of your workout routine. For optimal benefits, stretching should be performed when the muscles are warm, either at the beginning (following a 5-10 minute warm-up) or end of your workout.

Done before a workout, stretching increases a joint’s available range of motion and improves functional abilities. Post-workout stretching facilitates range of motion improvements and may decrease muscular soreness.

For more information, please contact Julie Sontag at 314-746-1533 or JSontag@wellbridge.com
Did you know there are specific movements and exercises you could incorporate into your workout that could make you a better golfer? Exercises that can give you more control over your swing, add yards to your driving distance, and help prevent common injuries associated with the sport?

The following exercises have been tried and tested to benefit anyone participating in golf, whether recreationally or competitively. They will help you improve and maintain the strength, flexibility, balance, and power needed on the golf course.

**One-Arm Chest Fly:** Sit with your chest up and shoulders back, and grip one vertical handle with elbow slightly bent. Slowly bring arm in until handle is directly across from your chest. Let arm come back slowly until wrist is in line with shoulder. Do one set with the left arm, then switch.

**Bosu Push-Up:** Place your hands on the outer edge of the flat platform, making sure they are directly under your shoulders. Maintain a flat back and tighten your abdominals throughout the motion. Descend until your chest is very close to the platform, and then slowly push back up.

**Bosu One-Leg Squat:** Place your weight on one leg on the Bosu ball and maintain balance. Slowly squat down, keeping your back straight. Push back up. Repeat reps on the same leg.

**Bosu Figural Ball:** Place your weight on the Bosu ball and maintain balance. Do a minor movement and return to the starting position.

**One-Arm Row with Small Twist:** Sit up tall with your legs out in front of you, knees slightly bent. Grasping cable stirrup with one hand, drive the elbow back keeping the arm close to the body. Slightly twist the torso and look over your shoulder. Return until arm is extended and shoulder is stretched forward. Do one set with the right arm, then switch.
Bosu One-Leg Squat: Stand on top of the dome with your weight on one leg, other leg out in front of you. Slowly squat down keeping your chest up and hips back. Push into the heel to come up, and repeat all reps on the same leg before switching sides.

Rear Delt Fly: Sit facing machine, arms parallel to floor and holding inside handles. With elbows slightly bent, rotate handles out and back until wrists are in line with shoulders. Return weight with controlled movement to start position.

Stability Ball Leg Curl: Place feet on top of a stability ball, hips raised off the floor and body forming a straight line from ankles to shoulders. Roll the ball in towards you, bending at the knees and keeping your hips raised. Pause, then slowly roll the ball back out by straightening the legs.

Bosu Figure-8: Stand on top of the dome with your knees slightly bent. Hold a small medicine ball and make a large figure-8 motion with your arms, following the ball with your eyes and doing a mini-squat as you bring your arms down. Keep the movement slow and controlled.
Bosu Superman: Lie face down on top of the dome with your arms stretched out directly overhead. Raise your arms, chest, and legs, holding it there for 2 seconds and contracting the lower back. Slowly lower back down.

Cable Pull: Pull a cable from a low position to a high position across your torso while rotating your trunk the same direction. First pull, but finish by pushing up and away. Switch directions between sets so that you pull from the left and the right.

Russian Twist: Center shoulder blades on the ball, back straight, arms extended and holding a medicine ball. Keeping your lower body stationary, rotate your upper body 90 degrees. Return to start, and rotate to the opposite side to complete one rep.

Unstable-Surface Plank: Place your forearms on the bosu’s flat platform or the stability ball, elbows directly underneath your shoulders. Hold a plank position keeping the abs and glutes in tight and body in alignment. Try lifting a leg to make it more challenging.