

INTERVIEW

FROM INTERN TO TEAM MEMBER: Meet Melissa Duro Hernandez



From intern to team member, meet Melissa Duro Hernandez. She had been looking for professional work experience in a “purposeful setting” when she stumbled upon information on the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians’ Tribal Internship Program.

Open to Tribal Citizens and community members 18 and up, the program gives participants a behind-the-scenes look at the Tribe’s entire enterprise through a hands-on approach by becoming a part of the team in areas like Marketing, Slots and Philanthropy. In turn, internships provide an outlet to gain work experience in settings that encourage and inspire one another.

“I had hoped to gain knowledge of what direction I wanted to go in after getting my bachelor’s in psychology,” said the 23-year-old University of La Verne alumna. “I had an idea about what I wanted to do, but I did not want to limit my scope of options.”

The internship program falls under the umbrella of an initiative launched by Tribal leadership in 2016, which looked to increase engagement within the community. The goal was to create a holistic learning approach that would help sustain the Tribe’s culture, history and traditions for generations to come.

With education being a key component in driving the Tribe forward, the internship program was created and has since opened the doors for many like Melissa to become a part of the San Manuel team. Internships are offered year-round, and were created with flexibility in mind with full- and part-time opportunities available.

Melissa has already completed three internships in areas like Tribal Family Services and Human Resources (HR), and her hard work and dedication to the program has led to a full-time position within the organization. In December, Melissa started as a Talent Acquisition Scheduler for HR, a position that was created with her in mind.

“This feels like a stepping stone to start somewhere,” she said. “Though I applied for the internship, during the tail end of it I was extended an offer for a full-time position. I asked when my interview would be and was told my internship served as my interview. To my surprise, I did not know I was going to get hired at the end, but it was very exciting to say the least.”

Melissa has big plans for the future. In addition to working full-time with the enterprise, she recently started a master’s program in organizational leadership at the University of Redlands and is looking forward to sharing her story as a way to encourage others to become part of the internship program.

“I think it’s important to take an opportunity to really learn something new about yourself and the Tribe, to keep moving forward, you have to allow yourself the chance to grow,” she explained. “When I started out, I asked myself, ‘What if I don’t live up to the role?’ But the internship made me feel like I was capable.”

Another program benefit – the chance to discover what career is right for you.

While working in Tribal Family Services, Melissa credits the department for allowing her to use her psychology skills to grow professionally. “But as I was talking to my director – Dr. Erika Beckles – about how I wanted to use my degree and what I wanted to do, she told me to consider looking into HR,” she said.

So she did.

“Once I did that I was able to discover another way I could potentially utilize my degree,” Melissa continued.

The road to success is not always easy, but Melissa’s biggest piece of advice to future interns is to not be afraid to ask questions because “everyone wants you to succeed.”

“I’m just thankful for the experience and the opportunity itself because without the internship program, I would not have real-life professional work experience,” she continued.

Visit sanmanuel-nsn.gov/internship to learn more or contact Janny VanBui at Janny.VanBui@SanManuel-NSN.gov