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In my senior year, my interest was sparked by several articles regarding the the entrepreneurial side of urban planning and community building. It was because of this interest that I chose to intern with Valmont Investments under Sewanee alum Woody Koppel.

Valmont Investments is a limited liability corporation owned by three individuals. The company specializes in the adaptive re-use and renovation of historic buildings in New Orleans. Their goal is to invest in blighted properties left over from the destruction of Hurricane Katrina and create livable and innovative housing. By retaining the historical integrity of a building, Valmont not only keeps the character of the neighborhood intact, but also raises the value of the property and those around it.

Day-to-day tasks involved with renovation can be daunting for one person. For this reason, many of the smaller tasks required on a job site became my responsibility. Whether it was meeting contractors, ordering material, or trouble-shooting a construction method, my days were never filled with routine. I was constantly required to put problem solving skills to good use in order to keep the project running smoothly, quickly, and efficiently.

Because Valmont retains some investments as rental property, I was also involved in the renting and property management aspect of the business. I answered tenant phone calls, scheduled work orders, and hired appropriate specialists in order to address problems in the rental units. Early in the internship, I noticed a specific need. When a quick reference was needed regarding an appliance, a warranty, or an improvement point, it took time and effort to find the necessary information on items in a unit. I created, and will continue to build, a property information log providing a quick reference of all the various aspects of a unit.

I was also in charge of renting vacant units, which required communication and salesmanship. I was responsible for every aspect, from marketing, to showing the unit, to answering questions, to drawing up and signing leases, to collecting rent. It was a process that demanded I be impeccably organized.

During my internship at Valmont, I had the realization of the main difference between a non-profit organization, where I had previous experience, and a for-profit business. A for-profit's final goal must be to have a positive bottom line. The most valuable point I learned through my internship with Valmont is that you must contribute a skill or idea to the company or management team which positively affects the bottom line. Otherwise, you are worthless to a company. This desire to contribute will continue to be my goal throughout the rest of my career.

My experience with Valmont has been extremely positive. I enjoyed my internship, have been offered a job, and have chosen to stay with Valmont for the time being. My job is a task-oriented one. I enjoy the fast pace and high energy involved. The size of the company is a very positive point. Valmont provides an atmosphere where I can ask questions and learn new skills. I am excited to have the opportunity to hone in on more specific topics in real estate as I pursue a career in this industry.