

Dream job experience for alumni

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When UiTM graduate Awatiff Hanim Aznan was offered an internship with global news network Al Jazeera in Qatar, she was over the moon and jumped at the chance. Fatimah Jaharadak talks to her about her once-in-a-lifetime experience.

ALUMNI Awatiff Hanim Aznan never expected to be more than a ‘tea lady’ for the duration of her four-month internship at Al Jazeera in Doha, Qatar.

Instead, she got to tag along with senior reporters and other broadcast journalists during her entire stint.

“It was an unforgettable experience. Firstly, I was over the moon when I received the offer. Later, when it was clear that I would actually get the chance to follow the reporters on assignment, that was really the icing on the cake,” said the 23-year-old Selangor girl.

Among the highlights from her time there was the opportunity to meet the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) Secretary General at UNEP’s Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. She also got to meet prominent traders and people from all walks of life, nationality and ethnicity.

“I will never forget my time at the convention. While there, I worked alongside producers and reporters to look for and ‘chase down’ prominent personalities for interviews,” said Awatiff.

During her internship, Al Jazeera’s Head of News, Heather Allan, assigned her as a researcher with the responsibility of browsing news, gathering facts and cutting videos.

Awatiff found it revealing that the newsroom was divided into two wings. The ‘input and planning wing’ would focus on news coverage and handing out assignments to reporters while the ‘output wing’ deals with all the scripts and producing the news hour.

One of her main roles was to transcribe video feeds. Later, she had the opportunity to work at programmes like ‘The Inside Story’, dissecting the day’s top story and identifying daily headlines.

It was the perfect setting to gain ‘real world’ experience for this Mass Communication (Journalism) graduate.

Presently, she is still learning to write the ‘Al Jazeera’ way. She will always remember the words one producer told her: “You need to be good in writing first, then all things will come after.”

Of course, it wasn't all plain sailing. Awatiff admitted to experiencing a culture shock with the working environment at Al Jazeera.

“Coming from a dual language environment in Malaysia to an exclusively English-speaking work space was something that I had to adjust to,” she pointed out.

She is, however, happy to have made many contacts in the world of global media. “It isn't easy to make friends abroad, knowing you're out of your comfort zone. You keep on having to introduce yourself and not give up the things that you want to do, but you would be surprised by the kind of positive help and support given by them, as they love to teach and would make time to point things that I should be doing,” added Awatiff.

In particular, she was impressed by the work attitude at Al Jazeera. Staff members are all committed to completing their daily tasks and assignments. Even though they have their own areas of specialisation, over time, they have learned to multi-task.

“The skills they have acquired can be used in a wide variety of disciplines — from writing stories, editing to producing. What we know theoretically is often completely different in practice,” said Awatiff.

Today, she keeps abreast of global news on Al Jazeera, BBC and CNN and also improves on the necessary news gathering and language skills on her way to becoming a good reporter or writer.

“We must bear in mind that practice makes perfect. While I was there, my work was constantly torn apart and corrected all the time”.

“But it didn't get me down. Instead of thinking about quitting, all I felt was a burning desire to improve and do well,” she added.

(Ed: This article was first published in Varsity Voice, a monthly publication jointly produced by the New Straits Times and Universiti Teknoogi MARA (UiTM) under the newspaper's Journalism on Campus project.)

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