SUCCEED faculty and staff take great pride in celebrating and embracing diversity and are very passionate about putting these beliefs into practice. SUCCEED contributes to the diversity of the St. Louis professional community through vocational experiences. SUCCEED vocational experiences are designed to allow students opportunities for self-discovery, acquisition and refinement of skill sets, and identification of passions. These experiences can take place on and off campus. Through these opportunities, students are not only cultivating work-related skills, but are also adding to work place productivity and culture throughout St. Louis.

SUCCEED student Niko Puhar is developing his skill sets and laying foundations to achieve his career goals through his vocational experiences. Throughout the spring semester of 2015, Puhar interned at the Olin Library at Washington University. His main tasks included revamping the website, keeping the website updated and user-friendly, and adding to the design element of the website. Puhar spent at least eight hours a week at the library, taking public transportation to and from the UMSL campus.

Puhar remarked that both his favorite and least favorite element of his experience was “working with a team of people.” Working collaboratively can bring many challenges and many rewards. Puhar has definitely overcome many challenges associated with collaboration and reaped numerous rewards.

SUCCEED Coordinator of Vocational Experiences Andrew Johnson commented that, “Niko has improved leaps and bounds in his customer service and social skills. Niko even leads a team meeting each month to highlight his changes to the website, and also creating next steps – as well as teaching the team how to use and change the website in the future.” Puhar divulged that, despite feeling nervous and even uncomfortable, leading these meetings have been his proudest moments within his experience.

Puhar found much support and a strong mentorship in his supervisor Ted Chaffin, Head of Instructional Support Services at Washington University Libraries. Chaffin remarked on the strides Puhar has made-“Niko appeared nervous when he started working with my team and I here in Olin library. Though he might be a little hesitant, he now walks up and engages with group conversations, and also has no hesitation to seek out answers from me.”
This vocational experience has been educational for both Puhar and his supervisor. Chaffin reflects on the challenges of taking on an intern. “My biggest challenge was to begin setting clear expectations for the internship activities, and pushing Niko into interactions with others which were obviously uncomfortable for him. My team and I had never hosted an intern before. When we got the opportunity to work with Niko we dove right in without an existing process, and that was really a challenge for everyone. Luckily Niko was patient and willing to check in with me regularly regarding his progress and potential activities.”

Chaffin recognized the profound increase in Puhar’s social skills and confidence working with a group: “My favorite memory working with Niko involves his sense of humor. During one of our meetings I made a comment about how I’m always trying to make people laugh and that it sometimes falls flat on delivery. Niko gave me this huge smile and made a joke by saying, ‘at least you think you are funny.’ We both cracked up laughing and it was definitely a sign that he had reached a true comfort level in our interactions.”

This experience has been incredibly valuable to Puhar who appreciates being paired with such a supportive supervisor in a work environment that matches his personal interests and career goals. Puhar hopes to eventually have a job in television and acknowledges that “my internship has helped by giving me some experience working with a group or team of people.” Puhar looks forward to embracing new vocational opportunities during his senior year with SUCCEED and hopes that many job prospects are on the horizon.

Sarah Gordon, May 2015