



Contact: Executive Director Eric McGarvey, 828-280-1161, or emcgarvey@summeronthecuyahoga.com

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Summer on the Cuyahoga
P.O. Box 110662
Cleveland, OH 44111
www.summeronthecuyahoga.com

CLEVELAND (Sept. 14) – During a summer when so many plans were canceled or postponed, the Summer on the Cuyahoga college internship program welcomed 26 talented students to Cleveland for paid summer internships, connections with local college alumni, and an immersive introduction to the promise and possibilities of launching their careers in Northeast Ohio.

Summer on the Cuyahoga, a nonprofit founded in 2003, began as an idea by local graduates of Yale University who believed that if they could bring students from Yale to Cleveland for a summer, those students would want to move here after graduating. That first class of interns – and their employers – responded so enthusiastically that other college alumni groups soon clamored to join them.

Ameer Kim El-Mallawany, former principal of Campus International High School and one of the SOTC interns that first summer, urged this year’s interns during a virtual opening ceremony to explore Cleveland’s diverse neighborhoods, ethnic foods, and residents’ stories.

“Cleveland is resilient, it is entrepreneurial, it’s creative, it’s flexible,” Kim El-Mallawany said. “I love this place, because there’s never an idea that is too far from actualization. When you have a good idea in Cleveland, somebody’s going to help you make it happen; there’s always somebody who wants to hear what you have to say in this city, and it’s a beautiful thing.”

Over the past 18 years, SOTC has brought more than 1,000 college students to Cleveland (chosen from among nearly 12,000 applicants) for paid opportunities with some of the region’s top employers, as well as group housing, and exclusive networking opportunities with civic, business, and cultural leaders.

This year’s students were employed by: MetroHealth, Complion, SWAY Mobility, City Club of Cleveland, Karamu House, Cosmic Bobbins, StepStone Group, North Coast Ventures, Policy Matters Ohio, Diversity Center of Northeast Ohio, and National Risk Management Services. Twelve of the students stayed at Case Western Reserve University, while 14 were virtual interns.

This year, SOTC offered approximately 40 events and activities throughout the summer, both virtual events and socially distanced, in-person programs with virtual components. One of the highlights this summer was a weeklong Collegiate Career & Community Leader Virtual Mixer that featured over 15 hours of panel discussions, interactive workshops, and presentations, as well as one-on-one virtual resume reviews and small group digital networking sessions. The event drew nearly 100 participants including SOTC students, non-SOTC students, and professionals from throughout Northeast Ohio.

Cleveland’s affordability and the program’s nearly-free housing has enabled Summer on the Cuyahoga to attract one of the most geographically, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse internship cohorts in the region. SOTC works with career services, professors, department heads and campus organizations to attract diverse candidates who come from underrepresented and under-served backgrounds for the program.

Of the 70 interns in the 2019 cohort, 45 percent identified as Asian, African American, Jewish, Indian, Hispanic, French, Turkish, or Spanish; and 28 percent identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or pansexual. Of the 70 students, 39 were female, 30 were male, and two were gender nonconforming.

The students come from Case Western Reserve University, Colgate University, Cornell University, Denison University, Oberlin College, Ohio Wesleyan University, Smith College, and University of Chicago. The colleges contribute toward their housing, activities, and transportation costs, and provide career support and resources.

More than 160 Summer on the Cuyahoga interns have returned to Cleveland after graduation, for jobs, to continue connections, and sometimes for graduate school. As well, 99 percent of former participants said they would return to Cleveland for the right opportunity or recommend the city to their peers.

Testimonials from this year's interns:

“During a challenging time where the world is making it difficult to meet people, engage in meaningful conversations, and make lasting connections, I felt that the people in SOTC such as John [an alumnus] really made that easy to do. I truly am honored to be a part of such an impactful and connected program this summer.”

“I met so many incredible people this summer who are all extremely passionate about what they do. Hearing their stories and visions for a more just world solidified my own desire to enter the nonprofit world, and I learned so much from all of them. ... I am very grateful that I was able to engage so much with topics of racism, white supremacy, and racial justice in my time with the Diversity Center [of Northeast Ohio] this summer. It truly felt like the most important work I could be doing in the current moment.”

“Being a part of SOTC meant so much more than just an internship. It meant forming new friendships with other interns from other colleges and diverse interests, connecting with alums of my school as well as the partner schools, exploring Cleveland through group events, and developing young professional skills and mindsets.”

“This summer I believed I would just be staying at home being quarantined, but because of Summer on the Cuyahoga, I got to go out to Lake Erie, explore the wildlife and parks, and also meet some new great friends. This summer wasn't the lifeless drag of quarantine but rather jam-packed with activity and work that went by almost too fast.”

“Being a part of SOTC this summer was a unique experience due to the pandemic, but I really thought that the program did a fantastic job of adapting to the new restrictions that everybody was facing. I was glad to meet some of the fellow alumni in the Cleveland area and grateful for SOTC for making that connection. My internship experience was also a great way to engage with some of the up and coming startups in the Cleveland area. Overall, great experience.”

One employer said: *“Once again our SOTC intern surpassed our expectations. She was faced with the challenge of not just interning remotely but also navigating an organization in the grips of very unpredictable finances. Yet somehow she managed to establish trust quickly and build remarkably strong interpersonal relationships with several members of the staff.”*

EDITORS: Photos and Videos of SOTC participants are available.

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