



An Interview with Nicole Mayer (MScSM '23)

"MScSM has broadened my horizons for future career opportunities and enabled me to combine two of my main passions, working with children and caring for the planet, through my role at SickKids."

-Nicole Mayer

What are the job duties of your internship?

During my internship at The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids), I worked as part of the Sustainability Facilities group to increase the waste diversion rate of non-hazardous waste in the institution. My role involved three primary responsibilities that helped to aid SickKids in their goal to mobilize a green-friendly organization. The first responsibility involved interacting with multiple stakeholders, including nurses, doctors, and support staff, to understand the causes of waste generation and current disposal habits in order to create and implement an individualized sustainability strategy for their unique unit or area of the hospital. The second responsibility involved writing and publishing weekly articles, which were distributed to internal staff to raise awareness on sustainability, covering topics from single-use places to green transportation in alignment with provincial, national and international environmental campaigns and challenges. The third responsibility involved leveraging my experience with water quality management from my previous role to analyze the SickKids Pollution Prevention Plan and Assessment. To achieve this, I had to synthesize data and create presentations for select departments to ensure green procurement policies and practices were followed to reduce the chemical impact on the environment.

While interning this summer, which skill did you feel you should have known already?

I firmly believe that the MScSM program equipped me with strong skills in order to thrive in my internship role, apart from the sector-specific technical terms which I was able to pick up quickly during my internship. Through all the assignments, presentations and professional development sessions I completed in first year, I further developed my writing, presentation and interpersonal communication skills, which I leveraged in my internship. Specifically, Professor Jacob Hirsh's class on Managing Sustainable Organizations was beneficial for the outreach aspect of my role, which involved considering my audience and customizing my message when trying to influence the behavioural changes of the staff in the hospital.

What is the biggest reward you gained from this internship?

My biggest reward from working at SickKids is the connections I built through my interactions with all the different stakeholders within the organization. Through working at SickKids, I met and worked with some of the kindest people I have ever interacted with, from doctors to researchers to patients and everyone in between. Sustainability requires collaboration and cooperation; building relationships is essential to achieve this.

What is the biggest challenge and solution in your industry?

Given the vulnerability of the healthcare sector, one of the biggest challenges is implementing sustainability initiatives as per the initial intended plan. When implementing new projects, health and safety come first; therefore, some new initiatives can become challenging to integrate and vulnerable to the ever-changing environment during a pandemic. For example, due to isolation protocol, COVID-19 impacted my ability to complete some data collection on the waste diversion rate of non-hazardous waste in patient rooms.

How does your internship help confirm where you want to go for your future career?

My internship experience helped me expand my horizons beyond what I had previously envisioned for myself at the beginning of this program. Working in healthcare opened my eyes to different opportunities within the sustainability space and encouraged me to keep my options open to different career paths going forward.