

Dress for Success Scholar Reviews

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Clara Love (Duke '22)

During Community Summer, I worked in New Orleans, Louisiana with Dress for Success New Orleans (DFSNO)! Most of the job included creating and running job search/resume creation workshops for women who were unemployed, previously incarcerated, or in rehabilitation programs. As a further extension of that, I also designed and carried out curriculum in the Orleans Parish Prison for incarcerated women with ending sentences that aimed to ease their re-entry into society. My favorite part of my work was developing an entirely new 6-month long mentorship program between clients of DFSNO and volunteers with professional careers, consisting of 35 participants!

The biggest lesson I learned while working at Dress for Success (DFSNO) and living in New Orleans with other scholars is that it's important to know how to lead from different positions at different times. This means that leading from in front is not always the leadership style that a situation or community needs. Sometimes, leading from within the team or from behind is more helpful to the group as a whole. I would definitely recommend Dress for Success to anyone who loves fashion, has a passion for uplifting the lives of women, and/or is looking to learn more about the day-to-day functionalities of very small non-profits.

Niharika Vattikonda (UNC '22)

I worked at Dress for Success New Orleans--my job was pretty evenly split between working with clients and working on other projects to improve the organization's efficiency. In terms of direct client work, I worked directly with women of all backgrounds to help them pick out professional attire (for interviews, part-time/seasonal employment, and full-time employment), create resumes/cover letters/job applications in our career center, and assist with our Professional Women's Group and Alumni Professional Women's Group meetings. Some of the projects I've taken on this summer include customizing and implementing Salesforce, creating logic models to represent the organization's work in grant applications, creating templates and resources for the career center, building relationships with local business partners, creating a legal literacy program, managing social media posts, writing reflective blog posts, and more.

I loved working at Dress for Success New Orleans! It was truly a blessing to get to work with such amazing women and hear their stories about living in New Orleans before and after Hurricane Katrina, their job search process, and their families and communities--I would really recommend placing an emphasis on listening to your clients and really taking the time to talk with them and understand their background. Also, our mentors at Dress for Success (Brianna and Lori) are really flexible with the independent projects you choose to pursue! I had a wonderful time learning different technical skills for Salesforce, managing content for different platforms, and researching best practices for career development tools to bring into our career center.

Mary Ashley Murrah (UNC '21)

I worked at Dress for Success New Orleans (DFSNO) for my community summer in, you guessed it, New Orleans! I absolutely loved my summer with DFSNO and was able to pursue projects that fit my interests. I would split my summer into two halves. The first half of the summer we were moving DFSNO from their location on Magazine St. to a new, larger location on Josephine St. Through this process I learned a lot more than I was expecting to... My work (for the first month) consisted of moving boxes, packing boxes, planning moving logistics, and organizing the excess inventory sale. Though my work did contain a lot of

manual labor that I did not expect, I loved the opportunity to work with clients and volunteers on the moving process. I also really got to understand the driving force of DFSNO and how generous the NOLA community is. Naturally, some days were harder than others, but I don't think I will ever be in a position like that again- I knew I had to take advantage of it!

As for the second half of my summer, I was helping Brianna and Lori get settled in the new location as well as working on a few projects of my own. Every day I would suit clients and help them pick out clothes for interviews or their new jobs. This was my favorite part of my internship. Suiting a client is a very intimate process. You have to use very specific language and be encouraging at all times. This really improved my communication skills, especially when I was trying to understand what the woman was looking for in her outfit. Additionally, the women that walked through the door every day were some of the most incredible women I have ever met. They had some amazing stories about their perseverance after Katrina, their family dynamics, the systematic issues in some employment sectors, etc. The transformation in confidence that you would see over the course of a suiting was also a special thing to be a part of. In between suitings I would work on a lot of little projects. I would run donation days, organize the stock room/ showroom, assemble new furniture, etc. Additionally, I ran DFSNO social media for the summer (including during the move). This included Instagram and Facebook as well as content creation (infographics, flyers, images, etc.) on Canva or Illustrator. I also created an inventory system for the new location because DFNO had never used one before.

However, on top of that, my largest project for the summer was creating a career center curriculum and website platform for the DFSNO career center. DFS as an international nonprofit runs off of a model of suiting programs, career center, and networking. DFSNO had a functional career center, but I saw some space to improve. Therefore, I created a curriculum for their job search, cover letter/ resume help, and interview prep and then threw that onto a website that I designed. After I created that, I implemented the curriculum into the suiting program, and now more and more women use the DFSNO career center every day.

BIG POINT: Brianna and Lori are extremely open-minded and delights to work with. They want to make this summer what you envision it to be. I brought them my ideas and they were always willing to help me implement them and edit them. Overall, great Community Summer internship!

I learned that in a small, settled work environment you have to be a self-starter. I initiated the majority of the projects that I worked on, which I appreciated because it made me take ownership of what I wanted out of community summer. I also learned that it is ok to disagree with your boss- you just have to work with them to find a middle ground. I faced some hesitation when it came to the site I made for the career center, but Lori and Brianna were willing to work with me on making my vision succeed.

Best Restaurant: The Rum House

Best Coffee Shop: MOJO - but the Starbucks on Freret is actually very cool

Favorite afternoon activity: Walks in Audobon Park (seriously, so great)

Annie Dempsey (UNC '20)

I worked with Dress for Success New Orleans this summer as a full-time intern. DFS NOLA only has two full-time staff members, Lori and Brianna, so they rely on volunteers to make their mission happen. As their intern, I helped with a variety of projects and tasks. Some days I would be doing client appointments all day, and others I was working on research projects. They gave me a lot of independence and encouraged me to take initiative wherever needed. I really felt completely integrated into their work culture.

I also lived in the Joseph Street house, which was a really fun experience to be around all of my fellow scholars and friends all summer. We tried to make the most out of the time we spent in New Orleans, so we made sure to pack the summer with activities. We went on a swamp tour, went river rafting, took a group cooking class, and checked out the local festivals (there is a festival just about every weekend in New Orleans).

I loved both where I worked and where I lived over community summer. If you like working up close and personal with people everyday, Dress for Success is the place for you. It's definitely a job that requires a good bit of personal investment, and you will have to work some long hours sometimes, but it is worth EVERY second.

You can decide the balance between the importance of work and the place you're living. I loved New Orleans because there were opportunities to independently explore AND be with a group. You have to decide what kind of environment will benefit you the most.

If in New Orleans, make sure to try everything you possibly can. It's too awesome of a city not to. Meet new people, listen to their stories, and appreciate it while you're there--the summer goes so fast!

Be kind to the other scholars that are living with you. You will all become a family over the summer, and you are the first line of support if someone is having a bad day. Just be there for each other and respect everyone's differences.

The Dress for Success boutique is on Magazine Street, which is only a 5 minute drive from the Joseph and Valmont houses. However, they are planning to relocate closer to Downtown on Loyola Avenue. This may be a factor in wanting to bring a car or take the streetcar in terms of a longer commute.

Myla Swallow (Duke '19)

Anyone who ends up at Dress for Success on their Summer placement is a truly fortunate individual. I hope that Lori is still with the organisation because she is incredible, but even if she's not the women who support the work of DFS in the New Orleans community are passionate about their mission.

Every day I worked at DFS I was blown away by the generosity of the community and how much a new suit could change a women's outlook on life and her perception of what she was capable of achieving.

My tasks involved everything from suiting women, to sorting donations, to social media right through to tidying the boutique.

If you end up at Dress for Success you will never be bored.

I think the biggest lesson that I learnt while working there is that it's not my responsibility to solve every problem a women may come through the doors with but rather to listen to what she chooses to share and be a step along her journey towards attaining or regaining financial independence.

But also try to really allow yourself to be shaped by the experience and needs of the organisation, they allow you a lot of freedom to follow what you're interested in and if nothing else all the people from the clients and volunteers right through to the board members are extraordinary people whom it was my pleasure to get to know.

Alexandra Hehlen (UNC '18)

From day one my job at Dress for Success was challenging, demanding and exhilarating. I had to be quick on my feet, emotionally in-tune and positive. Working as a personal shopper requires a quick assessment of a client's needs and the type of clothes that would work best for the client's body type. But at Dress for Success I quickly found that the title of personal shopper entails more than just selecting clothes for someone; as a personal shopper for these women I found that I also had to give immense positive encouragement, listen to the clients tell their stories and vent about their situations, and boil down the complexities of fashion to a set of understandable dos and don'ts. Dress for Success is the first place these job-ready women go to after they have been released from jail, their drug or alcohol abuse programs, mental hospitals, and homeless shelters. When they step into the boutique, they bring along the baggage of negative memories and insecurities; it was my job to make them feel more confident.

In June, I shadowed my mentor, who was the Interim Executive Director and the only full-time employee at the time. She taught me the ins and outs of her day, routine and tasks. In July, she had to leave on short-notice for four weeks, and I took over the task of running the boutique for that time. My responsibilities included acting as a personal shopper for over 50 clients, helping clients with professional development (e.g. creating resumes), communicating with donors, and interacting with community partners and volunteers. I also scheduled appointments, updated social media accounts regularly, organized clothing donations, managed email accounts, answered phone calls, ensured boutique maintenance and organized the July Professional Women's Group Meeting. At that July meeting I presented to 30 women about "The Power of Fashion: Maximizing Your Wardrobe for Success."

I interned for Dress for Success New Orleans, a nonprofit organization that helps underprivileged women gain employment and economic independence by providing them with professional interview attire and a network of support. I was a personal shopper for over 50 clients, and I singlehandedly ran the boutique for the month of July.

Embrace your job and location fully with an open-mind and open heart, and trust your own talents and intuitions. Many scholars in New Orleans this summer worked for understaffed organizations, which means that many of us had big responsibilities. Be confident in your abilities – just because you've never had a job like yours before doesn't mean you can't excel. Your job may be strenuous or stressful, so also make sure to spend time talking about your job with other scholars – they are your biggest resource to help you talk through what you're learning on a daily basis. And finally, write down what you learn!! Otherwise you will forget what you did!!