

An internship at UKrant



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Final report

Liberal Arts and Sciences

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Introduction and Rationale

On September 14th, 2020 I started my internship at UKrant. For 13 weeks, I worked from Monday to Thursday, to learn about the process of publishing a weekly newspaper. In addition to my internship, I followed a minor in journalism. The combination of the internship and the minor allowed me to combine theoretical and practical experience in journalism. My final internship day was on December 10th, 2020. This report provides all the information about my past three months as an intern.

In the months leading up to my third year, I researched several different minors. Eventually, I learned about a faculty minor in journalism, and I decided that would be my pick for the first semester of my third and final year. On Nestor, I sometimes did see internship announcements passing by, but I had my mind set on a minor, and never really looked into them. Then, I believe it was somewhere in June, an announcement on the internship page said that there was a vacancy for a three month internship at the UKrant. I might sound like a cliché, but I immediately knew that it was an opportunity I could not ignore. In the years I have studied in Groningen, I sometimes looked at opportunities to work at the UKrant, but was always discouraged by the sight of professional journalists and master students who worked there. I always assumed that I did not have enough experience to have a chance to work there. And now, there was this chance just presenting itself to me.

I have always had a big love reading and writing. When I was eleven years old, I wrote a 'book' about a yeti, which was printed and distributed in my primary school. Growing up, I continued to read many books; I always followed the news and occasionally wrote a story. During my gap year between high school and university, I took an eight-week writing course, which was birthday gift from my father to me. Despite my interest in journalism and writing in general, I was never sure – and still am not – whether it was really something I wanted to pursue. But at this point, I really felt like a chance to build some experience as a student editor, would be a great opportunity for me to have a taste at the job of a journalist.

I discussed it with some of my friends and my parents, and everyone I talked to, encouraged me to apply. In July, I wrote my motivation letter, brushed up my CV and applied for the internship.

Preparation for the internship

Because I had not considered doing an internship before I saw the vacancy from UKrant, I had invested little time into searching for internship possibilities. Moreover, I was lucky that this specific internship was ready-made by both the UKrant and UCG. This meant that little was asked of me prior to applying for the internship. The vacancy contained a clear description of what UKrant was looking for, and had listed all the material I needed to provide.

The application procedure was clear and simple: I had to hand in a motivation letter and my CV. I usually keep my CV up to date, so all I had to do is check that everything was correct and polish it a little bit. The motivation letter was supposed to be one page long, and I wrote it quite a while before the deadline. People around me help me correcting, formulizing and paraphrasing some parts. When both the CV and motivation letter were done, I send them to the internship coordinator of UCG. After that, I just had to wait and see whether the UKrant would invite me for an interview. I was taking a while – it was also in the middle of the summer break – and I was not sure if anything was going to happen. In the meantime, I had signed up for my minor in journalism, because I was not sure whether I would be accepted for the internship. While the time passed I was slowly starting to prepare for classes, thinking I had the biggest chance of spending my semester doing a minor.

At some point in August, I emailed the internship coordinator again, asking if there were any updates. She, in her turn, asked UKrant, and a couple of days later I received an email from Yelena, the international editor of UKrant. They invited me for an interview on Wednesday, September 3. I spend the next week I preparing for the interview. I tried to come up with potential questions they could ask, and tried to think about how I would answer them. Moreover, I talked about it with my friends and family, hoping it would help me think of new ideas and answers. I also read articles from the UKrant, and looked up all sorts of details about them online, to ensure I knew what I was talking about. I also researched the two editors that would be interviewing me, and read some of their articles.

In their job description, UKrant also mentioned that they were looking for someone ‘curious’, ‘critical’ and with a ‘good eye for news’. Moreover, the job description said that you would be writing and interviewing, and you would become part of the editorial staff. Because of the description, I was extra focused on the news in the week leading up to the interview, and made sure to read many newspapers, and so I knew what was going on in the world.

When the Wednesday of the interview was there, I biked to the UKrant office, which is located next to the Harmonie building in the centre of Groningen. I walked into the office and met my two interviewers, one of which would later become my internship supervisor. We went to a meeting room upstairs, and had an interview that lasted approximately an hour. They asked me many questions, some of which I had prepared for, some that took me be surprise. They asked me about my favourite books, newspapers, my motivation, what I thought about UKrant, what my own ideas were for articles, how I would handle certain situations and much more. Afterwards, I had mixed feelings about the interview. On one hand, it went really well and I felt that I had a good connection with both of them. On the other hand, they were critical and I saw that they were not satisfied with all the answers I gave. Another thing that worried me was that I felt that they were looking for someone with more experience, and I literally had none. I had never even had an article published yet.

On Wednesday, the week after the interview, one of my interviewers gave me a call. She told me that she ‘had good news for me’, and that I was accepted into the internship. I could start the next Monday, September 14, at 09:15.

Expectations

I had quite a few expectations about the internship, some of which turned out to be true and others that were simply wrong. What was clear to me from the beginning is that I would mainly be writing stories. I also knew that I would be working in the office, together with the main editorial staff, and that we would regularly have meeting where we discuss ideas about stories. All these ideas turned out to be true: I was assigned my own desk in the newsroom, and my first Monday morning started with a meeting where we discussed the planning and ideas for stories.

What I did not expect beforehand was how much freedom in my writing I had from the very beginning. Because I had zero experience beforehand, I expected them to be quite alert about what I was writing, and would control some of the work I was doing in the beginning. However, this was not the case at all. Of course, in the beginning they gave me assignments, and helped me with the different steps in the process, but when it came to the writing, I was very free to do what I wanted. It was only after I had finished, that I would sit with someone and that we would go through my article and adapt and correct parts of it.

Description of the UKrant

UKrant is the independent newspaper of the University of Groningen. It publishes stories about the university, students, sports, culture, arts and much more. Once every week, a digital newsletter with the stories is send to all the students of staff of the university. Articles are published in both English and Dutch. On average, the UKrant has 200.000 views per month, and it is spread among 40.000 students and staff members. The UKrant has a so-called ‘UKrant-code’, which lists all the values and basic principles of the newspapers. In the code it is stated that their key words are ‘factual, independent, reliable, transparent and honest’. UKrant also acknowledges and holds on to some of the fundamental rules of journalism, such as fair hearing, fact checking and presenting balanced news.

UKrant is structured in two groups. The first group is the main editorial staff, which consists of eight members, who are professional journalists. Together they take care of the process of creating the paper from beginning to end. They also write stories, but are also in charge of all the surrounding tasks that need to be carried out. Next to them, there is a large group – about 30 people – that consists of students and freelance journalists. They occasionally write stories for the newspaper.

Tasks and activities during the internship

During the internship, I had to carry out many different tasks. Throughout the weeks, the tasks also gradually became more difficult, as I was given more responsibilities. Below you will see a list of all the tasks and activities during the internship.

Writing stories

The principal task I carried out at UKrant was writing stories. There were three types of stories I worked on: NEWS (350-500 words), NEWS+ (500-1000) and Magazine (1000+). In the beginning, I mainly wrote stories in the first two categories, as those often are easiest, shortest and have a clear structure. Initially the topics for these articles were given to me by one of the supervisors, but later in my internship I also discovered newsworthy events that I wrote about for UKrant. What I notice now I think back to the beginning is how much trouble I had with the structure of a news piece. As I had no prior experience, I had never heard of things such as a ‘pyramid scheme’ and answering the ‘who, what, where, when, why’. All this type of stuff had to be explained to me. However, throughout the weeks I really grew into writing the stories, and got better and better and gained a natural feeling for the structure of these types of texts. Now I understand how to write a strong beginning that grasps the attention, and how to include quotes in a useful manner. Even though it is far from perfect, and I still have a lot to learn, I do feel that I have taken my first steps in to learning how to write news.

Later in my internship I also worked on magazine stories, which are the larger stories that include multiple interviewees and background research. With these types of stories, you have a lot of freedom in choosing the topic and whom you interview. I really enjoyed writing these stories, and liked talking to people who told me interesting stories. Similar as to the news stories, I had some trouble with finding the right structure of these texts. I honestly still find it hard to write these types of long articles, but I also know that it takes a lot of time and practice to learn how to write these.

Interviewing

Interviewing was also an important task during the internship. To me, this was, and still is, the most challenging task. Since the beginning, I struggled with finding the right tone and asking the right questions. Every single time I had to call someone, I also had to find courage and after every conversation I felt a little relieved. I have talked about this with my supervisor Christien, and she ensured me it is normal that you feel unsure of yourself in the beginning. She gave me important tips: prepare well, try to make it a two-way conversation, give a little of yourself and always be clear about your intentions. This really helped me with growing more confident in myself, which resulted in better interviews. I think, at the end of this internship, I am able to interview students and peers in a sufficient manner. I am, however, still struggling with ‘more important’ people, such as spokespersons and experts. But overall, I feel like this internship has taught me a whole lot about interviewing and communication in general.

Attending staff meetings and brainstorm sessions

During the internship, I was part of the editorial staff of UKrant. This meant that I was part of the staff meetings every Monday morning. To me, this was a great way to have a taste of professional meeting at a newspaper. Moreover, it taught me about all the processes around creating a newspaper, and why editorial decisions are made.

The brainstorm sessions took place every week on Wednesdays. A different group of student would attend them, and you would exchange ideas and brainstorm together. Just like all the student editors, I was part of the brainstorm sessions once every few weeks. Those sessions were a lot of fun, and a really good ways to develop an eye for news. Moreover, it was a good way to get to know the other at UKrant.

Receiving feedback

The vacancy of the internship at UKrant stated that you have to be good at receiving feedback. In my first few weeks, I realized that this is certainly true. Everyone from the editorial staff that I worked with was very straightforward and honest in their feedback. If I had done something well, they told me, but if something was not up to their standards, it was also made clear. In the beginning, this sometimes came across a little harsh, but as time progressed I learned that it was incredibly useful and that I quickly improved in my writing.

Evaluation of tasks

If I review all of the tasks mentioned above, I think I can conclude that my own working attitude has been good. As I mentioned before, the beginning of the internship was the most difficult for me, because I had little experience and everything I encountered was new. I, however, was very eager to learn and tried to improve as fast as possible. From my supervisor at UKrant, I have heard that she was proud of my quick improvement, and that I am able to work really hard. She also told me that I often was a step ahead of where she thought I would be. That is something I am proud of.

The tasks I could improve on most without a doubt is interviewing. Even though I have had quite some practice in these past three months, I realize that I still have much to learn before I can conduct an interview like professionals do. Therefore, I am happy that I can continue to work at UKrant, and hopefully improve on this skill.

Furthermore, I think I could sometimes have asked a little more questions. I can be an introvert person and like to do things right immediately. The combination of those two things sometimes makes it difficult for me to ask for help. During my internship, I think I could have been a little more active in that sense, and go ask for help a little more often. However, I was lucky that my supervision was great, and that they often checked up on me and asked me how I was doing.

Tips for future internship students

A tip that I can give to students that would like to do this internship, or a similar one, is that you need to be ready to work hard and make long hours. It is no secret that in the world of journalism, you work with a lot of deadlines and sometimes have to perform under pressure. This also is something I noticed during my internship, which sometimes made me feel stressed. But, during my internship I did what I could to ensure I fulfilled all my tasks, even if that meant that I would work more hours than was expected of me.

Another piece of advice is that it is appreciated if you take initiative and are independent. As an intern, it obviously is not strange to ask questions and seek for help, especially in the

beginning. But I noticed that my coordinators appreciated it if I came up with ideas myself, and took the lead in certain situations. That way, you can also do more, and show more of yourself, something they might not expect beforehand.

Finally, I would say (but I think this goes for any internship) that it is important that you are reliable and trustworthy. At UKrant they work with deadlines, and if you promise you do something, they simply expect you to do it as well. This way, you also build a good relationship with your supervisor, as they see you are responsible and able to carry out your tasks. If you cannot do something, or are not able to make it to the deadline, be honest about it and discuss what other options you have.

Personal learning process

There are many things I have learned in these three months of internship. I am confident that I have not only improved of my professional and academic skills, but that I have also grown on a personal level. Below, I will evaluate both my professional and generic learning goals that I had drawn up before the internship.

Professional learning goals

Improve writing skills

If there is one learning goal that I have certainly met, it is the improvement of my writing skills. At the start of the internship, I knew very little about writing articles, as I had no prior experience. Of course, I had done some research into writing, but I had never put that into practice. If you look at the articles I have published during the three months, you can also see improvement in my writing style and the complexity of the text. A good example of this is if you compare my very first publication (<https://www.ukrant.nl/de-kat-mag-niet-langer-zijn-gang-gaan-vindt-chris-smit/>) with one of my later articles (<https://www.ukrant.nl/magazine/tentamenfraude-een-spel-van-kat-en-muis/>). You can see that I have gotten better at structuring a text, incorporating quotes and formulating sentences.

Incorporate feedback

I am not sure whether my ability to incorporate feedback has improved. Throughout the weeks, I have certainly had to deal with a lot of feedback, which sometimes was positive, and sometimes was negative. Whenever I was given negative feedback, I felt the urge to work harder and try to improve as much as possible. But I think that is a characteristic that I have, and that has not necessarily changed during the internship. What I can say is that I have learned what it is like to receive direct and straightforward feedback, and how useful it can be. Concrete examples of receiving feedback are the talks I always had with one of my supervisors, after I had written an article. We would always go through the article together, and she would give me tips on how I could improve.

Improve reading skills

I do not think I have necessarily improved my reading skills at my internship. Before I started, I expected that I would be reading a lot of research before writing articles. However, in reality

this was often not the case. Sometimes, I had to read a research paper, but that was no different from what I had done in the past years in class. What I can say, however, is that I have become much more aware of the structure of an article, and the tricks journalists use to grasp the attention of the audience. Now, when I read a newspaper, I am very alert on these types of things. So, in that sense, I have learned a lot about evaluating and actively reading articles.

Gain interview skills

This is the learning goal that was the most difficult to me. Especially in the beginning, I was very unsure on how to act when conducting an interview. How do I start in a good manner, and how do I close of the interview? And what do I do if I run out of questions? Throughout the internship, I did become more and more confident, and it became easier for me to give someone a call, but I still am not completely happy with my own interview skills.

I had an evaluation meeting with one of my supervisors, and she also asked me what were things I was struggling with most. I told her that the interviewing was still difficult to me, and she gave me a few useful and practical tips. She, for example, told me to always be honest about your intentions, and to think of it as a conversation, instead of an interview. This might seem obvious to many, but to me it really helped to keep this in the back of my mind when I was calling someone. In one of my classes, a teacher once told me that people often don't really like to be interviewed, because they have a lot of other stuff to do. This idea often made me a bit insecure, as I did not want to bother anyone. But eventually I learned to push through a little more, and put my own insecurities aside.

Overall, I think there are still steps I can make regarding interviewing. But I also realize that it simply takes time and practice to become really good at it. Therefore, I hope to keep practicing in the upcoming years.

Generic learning goals

Effective communication

Prior to the internship, I was already aware that I would be meeting and talking to a lots of different people. Therefore, I also realized, it is important for me to be able to communicate effectively. I am a person that can be quite shy in the beginning, and this often stands in the way of me being able to communicate with everyone is the best possible way. But I saw this internship as a perfect way to break out of my shell, and challenge myself.

If I look back at my internship, I think that I have certainly improved on my communication skills, but it is far from perfect. When conducting interviews, for example, I often felt shy and was hesitant to ask particular questions. In addition, during the editorial staff meetings, I often felt shy and sometimes did not say everything I wanted to say. But still, I think I my skills improved over times, and as I got to know everyone better, I was also able to communicate in a more effective way. But still, I think if I learn about this more, I will be able to have even better conversations with the people around me.

Time management

I consider myself to be good at time management, but there have certainly been evenings where I sat in my room, stressing out about the deadline I had the next day. Some days, it was

especially difficult because I was combining a fulltime minor with a fulltime internship. And, it was sometimes hard to set my own boundaries, as I wanted to be able to do everything at the same time. Eventually I managed, but I did have to make a few sacrifices in my free time. But overall, I can say that I am proud I was able to manage everything, and give everything I had to show that I am able to multitask, and perform well with different tasks at the same time.

Critical thinking

Critical thinking also was one of the requirements on the internship vacancy. I consider myself to be someone who has a critical eye and often have an idea or opinion on issues. During the internship I also realized that this certainly is a good ability to have, as you need to keep your eyes open to any issue or event that could be reviewed critically. In one of the evaluation meetings I had with my supervisor, we also talked about this, and I was told that you should always stay alert for conversations where people are either complaining or very enthusiastic about something. Moreover, you yourself should also evaluate you own feelings and consider why you have a strong idea about something. All these types of signals could be useful and give you a clue that could eventually lead to an article. I find it difficult to say whether my critical thinking skills have improved, but I am sure that I have become more aware of more issues one could be critical of.

Creativity

The final learning goal I set up before my internship was learning to think creatively. For anyone who works at UKrant, this is an important skill to have, because you have to come up with your own ideas for articles. In the weekly brainstorm sessions, you can discuss those ideas, and if they are good, you are allowed to write about them. Throughout the weeks, I became better at discovering topics that were useful for articles. So, I think I can state that I have developed my eye for news. But, whether my overall creativity has improved, I find difficult to say.

Reflection of expectations

Most of the expectations that I had for the internship were fulfilled. I expected to be writing a lot of stories, and to receive extensive feedback on my work. Both were true. I spend the majority of my internship on writing articles, and after I handed them in, always received feedback on how I could improve. Another expectation that I had was that I would be interviewing a lot of different people. This expectation also met. In the three months I did my internship, I talked to all sorts of people: student, professors, researchers, board members, spokespersons and many more. It was a really great way to practice interviewing all these different types of people, and to learn to use a specific tone when talking to someone.

An expectation that did not come true was that I thought I would be doing quite some investigating. Of course, to some extent you research your topic and search for the people you want to talk to. However, since we are so close to the university and it's students, there was not really any investigation I had to do. Often numbers and contact details were already available, and it was a matter of giving those people a call and convincing them to be

interviewed. Another thing I did not expect to be doing a lot is searching for students by myself. I am not sure what I had expected, but when you have to write an article, it is your own responsibility to find students who would like to be interviewed. This often means that you have to ask around in your own group of friends, which I sometimes felt a little guilty about.

During the internship, there were some difficulties I came across. One of the main ones was that I was doing both a minor and an internship at the same time. This caused me to do the hours of the internship during the day, and work on my courses during the night. This was rough at times, and sometimes gave me stress. Especially when I had assignments due for both activities, which caused me to work all through the weekend. However, I really noticed that I grew into planning and juggling both, and that I got better at it as time progressed. Now that I look back at it, I am really proud that managed to do both. I feel like it has brought me a lot and that I have proven to myself I can perform well under pressure. Moreover, it was extremely useful for me to combine a theoretical minor in journalism with the practical work at the UKrant. I think this experience has given me a unique change to take a look at multiple sides of journalism.

Another difficulty was the fact that I had to work from home after four weeks. Even though I am extremely grateful that I was able to spend the first half of my internship in the office, it was a disappointment that I had to sit at home for the rest of it. It was harder for me to focus in my own room, and I found it more difficult to ask for help if someone is not sitting directly next to me. However, I was really happy that my supervisor checked up on me regularly and made sure that I had enough to do to pass the time.

A final difficulty of the internship was my own communications skills. I can be quite an introvert person and sometimes find it hard to ask for help. Because of that, I often make things more difficult for myself than they should be in real life. I think I can certainly improve in becoming a little more assertive, and ask for help more.

Summary of internship supervisor feedback

Evaluation meetings

The first and most formal way of receiving feedback was through the evaluation meetings. In total, I had two of those meetings. The first meeting was close to the half waypoint of my internship, and was together with my internship supervisor. At this point, I still worked in the office, and we went to one of the meeting rooms, where we spoke for about an hour. My supervisor asked me questions such as: How are things going? What are things you find difficult? What do you still want to learn? I told her that I thought things were going well, and that I still want to improve on my interviewing skills. Moreover, I mentioned that I would like to write bigger stories. She agreed that I was ready for that, and in the weeks after I started working on larger articles. She also provided me with tips for interviewing.

The feedback I received in this meeting was that I was doing well. She did say that I could come up with my own ideas a bit more, and that I should not be shy to propose some ideas for articles. But, she was impressed by my work so far, and told me to keep going the same way.

In the final evaluation meeting, which took place in the final week of my internship, we discussed my progress over the past weeks. My supervisor told me that she was impressed by my work, and that she was always surprised by how fast I picked up on the tips she gave me. Moreover, she had not expected someone with no experience to do as well as I did. I was very happy with this feedback.

Feedback on articles

The second main type of feedback I received was on the articles I wrote. This happened with almost every piece of writing that I handed it, and always was very useful. The main feedback I received in the beginning was that I needed to work on the structure of the text. Especially with news articles it was difficult for me to find the right words to start. Gradually I learned that the most important part of the text always goes first, and that you have to follow a pyramid scheme.

Later, I received a lot of feedback on the ‘sharpness’ of my articles. Often they thought that my writing was a little soft, and that I could formulate it in a more straightforward and harsh manner. Moreover, I had to select quotes that were a little more controversial, instead of always using those that fit well into the story. This is something I am still trying to work on.

Editorial staff

The final form of feedback was given to me through the editorial staff. This was not at planned moments, but often was in between conversations. The international editor, for example, once sat with me and discussed an English article I had written. The news editor also often gave me casual tips, when we went out for a coffee or were on a break. And, the editor-in-chief often gave me feedback when we were in the weekly meetings. He told me what he thought of my articles, and how he thought I could improve.

Future career orientation and prospects

At the interview for the internship, I was asked whether I wanted to be a journalist after my studies. I honestly told them that I had no clue yet. And that is still case. All I know is that I enjoy writing, and that I am very interested in the news, but I am certainly not sure whether I want to make a career out of it. I think journalism is a tough job, and that you need to work hard while not earning a lot of money. Moreover, it is an occupation that appreciated less and less. All these factors combined make me doubt whether I would want to practice it as a full time job. In addition, I also have quite a few other academic interests, such as law, philosophy and politics. In an ideal world, I hope to find a way to combine all these interests in a job.

However, the internship did teach me a lot about journalism, and has shown me many of the great aspects of it. Every time I had conducted an interview, I was impressed by the amazing stories I heard, and really felt that everyone has something interesting to tell. I also know that I enjoy putting my thoughts into words, and that I do have a natural feeling for writing texts. What I am very happy with is that UKrant has offered me a job, so I will keep working for them after the internship, as a freelance student editor. This is a great opportunity, which I am

very grateful for. In the upcoming year, I hope to improve my skills and to learn even more in the area of journalism.

Summary

In summary, this internship has brought me a lot, on a personal and professional level. In the past three months, I have learned to write articles, conduct interviews, incorporate feedback and work in a professional setting. Moreover, I have learned about my own weaknesses, and have overcome some of them. I have learned about communication, improved in asking for help and learned that I can work in a team. Finally, I have proven to myself that I handle a high workload by myself, and I am proud that I have managed to do both an internship and a minor at the same time. Even though I have not been able to meet all my learning goals, I feel like I have taken a big step forward, and have improved as a person. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity I have had at the UKrant, and I feel like these three months have taught me more than any course about journalism could ever do. I enjoyed working at UKrant and have gotten to know lots of new people.

It remains unclear what I want to do in the future, but I have discovered that there are lots of aspects of this job that I appreciate. I am grateful that I have the opportunity to keep working for UKrant, and hope to explore more opportunities and write many more articles.

Appendix

Logbook

Internship at UKrant, September 14, 2020 – December 10, 2020-12-13

Week 1

It is the first day of my internship at UKrant. My day starts at 09:15, and I arrive at the office fifteen minutes early. I decide to walk another round through the centre of Groningen, to pass some of the time. While walking I – of course – run into one of the employees of UKrant. I wave at her, and she looks surprised, as I am walking in the opposite direction of the office. What a great start.

At 09:11 I enter the building. My internship supervisor Christien (magazine editor, whom I have met before, during my interview) shakes my hand. She says, ‘Sara, good to have you here’. I also see Yelena (the international editor, one of my interviewers and the woman I ran into a few minutes before) and Giulia (the news editor). We start with the first real meeting at 09:30, which is a meeting with the editorial staff of UKrant, which happens every Monday. Due to Corona, the meeting is online. I go to one of the meeting rooms and log into the zoom meeting. I see nine unfamiliar faces, introduce myself and listen while they discuss the planning of the week.

‘I have the first assignment for you’; Christien tells me when I am back in the newsroom. I am supposed to call a professor of ecology, who was in the news because he had said some

controversial things about cats. I am supposed to call him and ask him whether he hates cats. After, I need to write a 'five question', which is a format at UKrant where you write an article with five questions, and you answer them. It is an easy format, and therefore a good start for me. I am nervous when I call him, but he is kind and we actually have a fun conversation.

The rest of the week I am taught a lot about the UKrant and all the procedures. I sign a contract and discuss my working days. I am introduced to other members of the editorial staff; learn about the weekly newsletter, the difference between news stories, features and magazines. I interview a RUG alumnus who wrote a book about stress among students. My first two short stories are published. I discuss them with Giulia and Christien, and they almost completely rewrite both of them. We discuss them again. They give me many tips and tricks and teach me some of the basics. I fill out some of my ideas for stories on an excel sheet. They give me some more feedback. The week has passed before I know it.

Week 2

In week 1, I proposed an idea for a story, where I interview a professor at the RUG, who wrote an article in a Dutch newspaper about online education and corona. I am allowed to give him a call and ask him some questions, to write another 'five questions'. Before I do so, I talk to Giulia, who coordinates this assignment. We talk through the questions I want to ask him, and she helps me a little. After gathering some courage, I give the professor a call. He is a professor of journalism and I notice that he notices that I am quite inexperienced. Yet, he is very nice and we talk for about half an hour. Afterwards, I ask him whether he wants to read the story and adjust it on factual inaccuracies before we publish it. He laughs. 'You know you were supposed to ask me this *before* the interview, right?'

On Wednesdays I work at home, because most of the editorial staff is in the newsroom to finalize the weekly newsletter. At 12:00, Christien gives me a call. Sofia, one of the student editors, proposed an idea for an article about students who have corona. Christien thinks it is a good idea that Sofia and I to work on the article together. At 16:00 the entire staff (editors and students) of UKrant have food and drinks at the Noorderplantsoen together. It is a good way for me to meet everybody. I am very nervous when I bike there, as I am suddenly new in a group of over thirty people.

Sofia and I start to look for students who want to talk to us. But, it turns out it is difficult to find students who openly want to tell something about them having corona. Yet, Christien pushes us: she does not want anonymous students. So, we continue to look. Eventually we find three students. But, after we interview them, one of them does not want the story to be published. We are frustrated and continue to look for someone else. We write the story and hand it in on Monday. We receive a lengthy message from Yelena (international editor) who asks us to call our interviewees again and ask them some more questions. I notice is a nice way of saying that our story was not great. I call my interviewee again, and Sofia and I rewrite the story. Eventually it is published, but it is not the story I am most proud of.

Week 3

During corona, many student houses in Groningen are causing trouble in their neighbourhoods. They are partying, putting on loud music and bothering the people that live around them. The mayor of Groningen is fed up with their behaviour and sends a letter to 135 houses that are on the 'blacklist'. In the letter, he tells the houses this is their final warning, and if the police receive any more complaints, they will be fined and their music will be taken from them. Giulia gives me the assignment to go to some well known neighbourhoods in Groningen en try to find students that live in these houses.

'Doing research on the street', she calls it. I bike to the neighbourhood and it takes me about fifteen minutes to find courage to ring the first doorbell. Surprisingly, while I am doing my search, it is becoming more and more fun. Most of the students I talk to are very nice and I have some good conversations. Sometimes, however, I have to take a deep breath after a door is slammed in my face. After a couple of hours, I have found some students who have given me good quotes, but I still have not managed to talk to one of these houses on the 'blacklist'. I almost give up, but then decide to try one more time. I ring the doorbell and a guy opens the door. He is extremely nice and tells me his house is on the blacklist. He even shows me the letter of the mayor and I am allowed to take a photo of it. I thank him with all my heart and return to the office. In my article, I obviously directly quote from the letter. Christien texts me in the evening: 'Good job, Sara!'

On Tuesday evening, the prime minister announces that we all have to work from home. This means that my internship is now also is completely from home. I am disappointed, but try to make the best of it. On Wednesday I interview a PhD student who does research on sexual education in high schools. I write an article on it, and review it with Christien. On Sunday, Christien tells me that they want me to come to the office anyways, as they think that is best for me. From now on, I work in the office with only one person, which usually is either Christien or Giulia.

Week 4

This week I work on an article about students who support health services (GGD) during corona. We have discussed this article in one of the Wednesday meetings, where students and editors come together to talk through ideas. I told them I have a contact at the GGD and am now put on the story. It takes me quite some time to find others who want to be interviewed, but eventually I talk to three girls that work at the testing service at the GGD. However, when you write something about the GGD, you always have to check with them. So, I call one of the spokespersons of the GGD, who wants me to write an email with all the questions I want to incorporate in my article. I ask Christien whether this is common, and she is a little hesitant. She tells me that next time, I should be a bit more alert when talking to a spokesperson, as they often try to take control of your story. Eventually, the GGD agrees with my plan as long as they can read the story beforehand, and I write the article and send it to them. They correct some stuff and provide me with a picture. When this is all done, I can immediately send it to the final editor, as it is good enough and does have to be reviewed by Giulia or Christien.

On Wednesday I talk to Christien about my progress. I tell her that I sometimes find it hard to know how to behave when interviewing someone. How do you start, lead and end the conversation in a professional way? And how do I prevent it becoming a conversation where I just fire questions at someone? She gives me some tips. She tells me that I am doing well and we talk about some goals I want to achieve.

On Thursday I am asked to write a short news piece about a campaign by the RUG about corona. In short, the RUG made promotional video's that were a little offensive for many international students. I was asked to call the spokeswoman of the RUG – who UKrant talks to often – and ask her about the ideas behind the campaign. The conversation does not go well. The woman on the other side of the line feels quite cold to me, and she throws me of guard when she answers my questions with short 'yesses' and 'no's'. I try to continue the conversation, but it does not work out too well. I realize this soon after our call. After the conversation, Christien calls me, and tells me that she was just called by the spokeswoman who said she was talking to me and that I was not behaving professionally at all. This certainly was the worst moment of my internship. I disagreed with what the woman had said, but clearly I had done something wrong, otherwise she would not have called my boss. I apologized, and felt horrible about it the rest of the week. However, I certainly learned from this and later Christien and I could laugh about it.

Week 5

On Tuesday, stricter corona measures are introduced in the Netherlands. There is no way around it: I have to work from home, just like everyone else at UKrant. Nothing we can do about it. Together with another student editor I work on a big story about large student houses that are suffering because of the corona measure. It is a fun article, and me and the other student can work together well. I bike through Groningen all Wednesday to interview large student houses, which is fun. The guy I work with does some other houses and we have a call to decide how the structure the article. Overall it is a smooth collaboration.

I attend at coffee taste test from the RUG, in the old library. It is fun to be there, as students usually are not allowed to do this kind of stuff. As soon as the coffee employees hear that I am from UKrant they give me a lot of attention and are very kind. I like the coffee, but I hear around me that some people find part of the process of the taste test strange. After the test, I work on a slightly critical piece about it. A professor from the RUG responds to the article, and state that he agrees with the criticism I gave. I also start a survey about the Coronamelder app, which is spread both online and on the street. I hand out surveys to over 60 students on the street, which is fun and scary at the same time. Afterwards, Christien and I combine the results from the offline and the online survey. It turns out that few international know about the existence of the app. I give a call to the Safety Region Groningen and check with them whether they are aware of this. One of their spokesperson's later calls me back and thanks me for the information, and that they will try to improve their campaigning and aim it at more internationals.

Week 6

This week, Christien tells me she thinks I am ready for a large story. The topic: fraud during online exams. She is hearing more and more signals around her that this really is a problem. It turns out she is right about this: while I am writing the article all sorts of exams are cancelled because students cheated and worked together. At first I am hesitant about the topic, but once I dive into it I am becoming more and more enthusiastic. With the help of Christien, I reach out to many professors and ask them to tell me something about how they deal with fraud during their exams. I am surprised to see how helpful they all are, as they often forward me names and contact details of other I could try to contact. After a few days, I have interviewed over eight professors, who all have interesting stories and ideas.

At the same time, I am conducting another survey on the street. The survey is for students, and asks if and how they cheat during their online exams. Christien wants me to 100 students for the survey. This is a lot work and costs me hours every day. It is particularly hard since there are very few students in the buildings at the moment. But eventually I manage to talk to 100 students and have them fill out the survey. Once I am done, I combine the information from the surveys with the interviews, and write my first long article. Christien calls me after she reads it and tells me she is impressed by my work. Together we talk through the article, and I rewrite some parts of it. It is put on the front page of the newsletter of the UKrant.

Meanwhile. Giulia asks me to write a short news piece about Winschoterdiep, a student-housing complex that has strict corona measures due to irresponsible behaviour by some of its residents. I go there and interview some of the students. I write short piece on it.

Week 7

This week, I join a man who has his own business and cleaning out houses. I had been in contact with this man for a couple of weeks already, and this weeks the moment was there to start of my first reportage. This man clears out houses of people who have passed away or moved somewhere also. Because of this, he often finds all sorts of stuff that can easily be re-used. He therefore reached out the UKrant to ask whether it was possible to make a deal: we would write an article about it, and he would set up a website for students where they could collect free stuff. He would drive to Groningen every couple of weeks, and deliver to stuff directly to your house. It almost seemed to good to be true.

Christien thought it would be fun for me to join him on one of his working days. I contacted him, and he thought it was a good idea. I took a camera with me, and joined him on a job in a small town close to Groningen. I spend a day with him, and asked him all sorts of questions about his job and motivation. He walked me through one of the houses, and we talked about all the furniture that he found. It was really interesting to see and experience all of it. The day after, one of our video editors also went there, and made a video about him as well. I wrote quite lengthy article about my day with him, which was nice to do.

Christien gave me a call about the article. She mostly liked it, but felt that his personality should come forward a bit more. I adjusted some parts, and send the story to the man, for him to check. He appreciated the story, but also wanted control over large parts. He wanted to see

the pictures, and wanted his website to be promoted more. It was difficult for me to protect my values and to make sure that he would not influence the story too much. I was however, helped one of the editors, who talked to me about handling these types of situations. Overall, this all was a good experience, and taught me more about communication with your interviewees.

Week 8

It is time for another big story. This time, it is about the discussion regarding the binding study advise (bsa) at universities. The direct reason for this article is that there is discussion in the Netherlands as to whether this should still be there. A majority in the Second Chamber voted against it, and it is becoming a widely discussed topic. Therefore, I am writing a story about it.

I reach out to many people: professors, study advisers, student psychologists, education experts, policy makers and students. A study adviser from the faculty of science and engineering is the first to respond. She wants to talk to me about it, and tells me she had a strong opinion about the topic. I interview her, and after that there is bit of a snowball effect. More and more people respond to my emails, and eventually I manage to interview 13 different persons who can tell me something interesting about the topic. I also find a student who failed to receive a binding study advice twice, and he is helpful and provides me with a proper introduction to my story.

Confident about all the material I had gathered, I start writing the article. I soon find out, however, that it is more difficult than I had expected beforehand. Combining the many different interviews and making it into a coherent story is challenging. I structure and restructure the story dozens of times, and am really struggling. I work on it all week and throughout the weekend. Eventually, on Sunday at midnight I am satisfied. I hand it in on Monday morning, and Christien is happy with the result. She helps me adjust some of the parts, and I send out the story to all the interviewees. Luckily, everyone is happy with the result and I do not need to correct or change anything else. The story is put on the front page of the newsletter of the UKrant.

Week 9

In one of the Wednesday meetings, we talked about how dependent students are becoming on their laptops. Especially in these times, it is impossible to live without one. Christien thinks it is a good idea for a story, and I am put on it. In the beginning I am struggling a lot with the story, as it is difficult for me to find a place where to start. I reach out to some technology philosophers, but they are not responsive. I ask around among my friends, to see if anyone has an interesting story about laptop dependency, but nothing interesting comes up. When Christien gives me a call to ask how I am doing, I tell her this story is not going well. She understands, and tells me not to prioritize this story. I should just keep my eyes and ears open for the next weeks, and see if I hear something interesting for the story.

On a news website, I read a story about the binding study advise, that states that the bsa will not be cancelled this year at universities, regardless of the struggles first-year students are facing with the new measures. I forward the message to Giulia, and she asks me to write a news article about it. Subsequently, I reach out to Groninger Studentenbond (GSb) and ask them about their opinion on the issue. I have nice conversation with the chair and use lots of his quotes in the story. Then, I reach out to the spokesperson of the RUG. She tells me that I should ask the central association for universities in the Netherlands, and it is impossible for me to gain any information about the opinion from the RUG about the topic. The spokesperson tells me she will give me a call with more information, but she never does. Eventually, I decide to leave it out of the article, and simply mention that it is unclear what the RUG thinks of the issue.

Week 10

In the WhatsApp group of the editorial staff, there is a discussion about a topic that they had been thinking about for a long time: loneliness among students. Loneliness among young people has been increasing for a couple of years, and since the pandemic there are the media reports worrying numbers. In addition, the Hanze is starting a project on loneliness for their students. The staff of UKrant agrees that this is a topic that we should work on, and that it should be a bigger project than 'just' an article. One of the student editors that was supposed to be on it at first, could not do it anymore due to personal circumstances. Because of this, Christien calls me and asks whether I would like to partake in this project. I tell her I do, and that I think it is an interesting topic.

UKrant creates a small working group that exists of me, Christien, Giulia and Lidian (the video editor). We discuss our ideas about this project, and all become enthusiastic about it. Our idea is to write multiple articles, in which we shine a light on all sorts of aspects of loneliness. Moreover, we want to do something with a video. I am given the task to create a survey, which we want to distribute among as many students as possible. I work on it, and have it checked by Christien and Giulia. In addition, I start doing research on the topic of loneliness. I listen to podcasts, experts and read articles about it. The student that previously worked on the topic forwards me some relevant experts I can talk to. I reach out to some of them. I schedule two interviews with a PhD student and a sociologist, who have done plenty of research on loneliness.

Week 11

This is another week where I work on the loneliness project. I have two long interviews where I discuss the topic extensively. Both the woman I talk to are very helpful, and give me more insight into how to handle this topic. One of the interviewees recommends me to attend a live stream about loneliness, which is taking place the week after. I also finalize the survey, and we decide to distribute it after the Christmas break.

In addition, I work on two short news pieces. The first article is about a supermarket on the RUG campus that is closing down due to corona measures. For this, I reach out the spokesperson of the supermarket. The process of receiving an answer is slow, and I have to

call them again. Eventually they give me a response. I write a short piece on it. The second story is about gender-neutral toilettes at a building from the RUG. Christien had heard that only part of the toilettes in the building had become gender-neutral and that it caused confusion among students. I am supposed to find out what happens exactly. I first decide to bike to the building myself, and check out if I see anything strange. I walk through the entire building and look at every single toilet, but can't seem to find anything that puts me off. All the toilettes are clearly labelled as gender neutral. Once I return home, I give a call to the reception of the building. They tell me that they have no clue what I am talking about, and that I should try contacting someone else. I give Christien a call, and tell her about my own observations and the response from the reception. She tells me to check with some of the student editors, to see if anyone has heard anything about the situation. I talk to a couple more students, but really can't seem to find the answer. Eventually, we decide to cancel the article, as it seems that there is no story there.

Week 12

It is my second to last week at UKrant. Christien forwards me a memo that student party Lijst Calimero has send to the Board of the University. It is about mental health of students during the pandemic, and they think more attention should be given to it. The board has responded to it as well. Christien wants me to check with the student party what they think of the response, and why they have decided to hand in this memo in the first place. I give a call to the chair of Lijst Calimero, and she gives me some useful information. I write a news story on it.

Another larger assignment that I am working on is about drug use during corona. Many student editors have stated that they feel more students are using drugs, because they are bored and don't have any parties to go to. I am given some numbers from students I can talk to, and I have a total of three interviews with students. I also contact the VNN (Verslavingszorg Noord-Nederland) and the Trimbos Institute.

Finally, I propose a story about students that go swimming in the morning. A student had previously told me that there is a WhatsApp group of over sixty students, which often go swimming in the early morning. They do this as a type of meditation, and to have a good start of the day. One of the students that works at UKrant, and creates videos, is asked to make a video about this. On Friday, in the early morning, we both go to the city beach and I watch and write while she shoots a video of the swimmers. It is a fun experience, and the stories from the students are really interesting. It is also really nice for me to see how a video is being created, and how particular shots are being made.

Week 13

It is the final week. I have my last Monday morning meeting, and say goodbye to all the editors of the UKrant. Fortunately, I am allowed to keep working at UKrant after my internship, so it is not a definitive goodbye. But still, I feel a little sad that I have to leave. I have another meeting with Christien, were we once more discuss my journey, the things I have learned and the things that I have struggled with. I thank her for all the time and effort she has put into me.

Throughout the week, I continue to write on the story about drug use during corona. Moreover, I am given the assignment to write a story about recently published research about the influence of pre-academic factors on results in the first year of studying. I try to contact the writers of the research, but cannot seem to reach any of them. Eventually, I send an email to one of the writers, and she tells me she is too busy to have an interview. She does want to answer some question over her email, but I really want to talk to her live. She lets me know again that she is too busy, and Christien tells me to let go of the story.

A final story that I work on is one about high-level sports during times of corona. For this, I had reached out to the student judo association a couple of weeks ago. They gave me the contact details of two judoka's and this week I scheduled an interview with them. We talk on Google Meets for over an hour, and it is a very interesting conversation. The deadline for this story is after the Christmas break, so I will start writing on it during the upcoming week.

Articles

- <https://www.ukrant.nl/calimero-rug-moet-meer-doen-voor-eenzame-student/>
- <https://www.ukrant.nl/unis-houden-dit-jaar-nog-bsa-hogescholen-niet/>
- <https://www.ukrant.nl/de-kat-mag-niet-langer-zijn-gang-gaan-vindt-chris-smit/>
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- <https://www.ukrant.nl/we-kunnen-niet-een-hele-generatie-laten-opbranden-voor-ze-beginnen/>
- <https://www.ukrant.nl/hoe-studenten-omgaan-met-corona/>
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