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## Moving Forward: Automating a Walmart Executive View from Existing Manual Financial Systems

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**Moving Forward: Automating a Walmart Executive  
View from Existing Manual Financial Systems**

**by**

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**Advisor: Dr. Molly Rapert**

**An Honors Thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of  
Science in Business Administration in Finance and Marketing.**

**Sam M. Walton College of Business  
University of Arkansas  
Fayetteville, Arkansas**

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## **Introduction**

Walmart, the largest retail giant globally, is a company that needs no introduction. Headquartered in Bentonville, Arkansas, it has become synonymous with retail innovation and efficiency. Last summer, I had the unique opportunity to immerse myself in Walmart's culture and the world of finance and accounting through Walmart's Accounting and Finance Development Program (AFDP) internship.

### ***Walmart's Accounting and Finance Development Program (AFDP)***

The AFDP internship holds a special connection with the University of Arkansas, where Walton College of Business is one of the primary sources for recruiting talent. Despite not initially planning to apply, an email from Jason Adams, my Walton Honors advisor, changed my perspective. He offered insights into the AFDP internship and encouraged all finance and accounting majors to attend a mixer at US Pizza to learn more. Intrigued, I decided to attend on a whim and connected with numerous Arkansas alumni currently working in the full-time AFDP program.

The application process was swift, with a deadline the same night. Gratefully, I applied, submitting a resume and basic personal information. Soon after, I received an email detailing the interview format, comprising situational questions and a case study. Successfully navigating this process, I was elated to receive an offer, marking the beginning of an enriching journey with Walmart.

This year's AFDP internship comprised 38 interns from 18 universities across the country, making it the largest cohort the program had ever seen. Walmart provided housing for all AFDP interns in the Embassy Suites in Bentonville, AR. We were strategically placed across Walmart's various corporate offices in Bentonville and the respective finance teams that apply to have an intern on their team for the summer. Fortunately, I found myself at the epicenter – the Walmart Home Office. This prime location offered a holistic view of the intricate workings of the retail giant. Prior to the internship, we had the opportunity to express preferences for the specific financial team we wished to join. Out of 10 options, I highlighted three preferences and one exclusion. I was placed in the Enterprise Financial Planning and Analysis (FP&A) team.

A typical week involved spending Monday-Thursday in the office, where I collaborated with my team and delved into my summer project. I attended meetings with my team members, set up networking sessions with individuals whose jobs interested me, helped team members with their responsibilities, put time into my summer project, and attended weekly Q&A sessions with Walmart executives. Fridays were designated as "AFDP Fridays," focusing on bonding events, meet-and-greets with financial leaders, and training sessions. Three AFDP Fridays were dedicated to case study competitions, in which we spent the day preparing a presentation to solve a given problem with a random group of fellow interns. Despite being intensely competitive, the case study competitions enhanced critical thinking and public speaking skills. This layout that dedicated Friday to professional development is consistent with Walmart's employee-friendly culture.

### ***Enterprise FP&A***

Working within the Enterprise FP&A team meant dealing with the financial intricacies of Walmart Inc. as a whole, encompassing Walmart US, Sam's US, Walmart International, and Corporate. The team was divided into two sectors: the forecast team and the plan team. The forecast team focused on profit and loss, free cash flow, return on investment, and compensation, while the plan team focused on the long-range plan and annual operating plan. Both sides provided critical support to executive leadership, crafting presentations, preparing materials for

the Board of Directors, and contributing to the enterprise story. Hallie, my manager, was on the forecast team, so I spent my summer following her responsibilities specifically. We discovered we both are from Springfield, MO, and she also attended University of Arkansas. This shared hometown and alma mater created an instant connection and sense of relatability between us.

My summer project that Hallie assigned me was to utilize a semantic model to automate and visualize data that informs leadership of the team's enterprise forecast. To start, I familiarized myself with the main documents my team used, one of which included all the financial data for Walmart US, Sam's Club, Walmart International, Corporate, and the Walmart enterprise. I learned how to use necessary programs and collaborated with the Enterprise FP&A team's business partners. I then used the programs I learned about to build the semantic models that I thought would be helpful for the team. My project resulted in two deliverables: 1) a model that mimics the view shown to leadership each month, but I programmed to operate in real time, and 2) a view that gives the forecast team a clear look into selling, general, and administrative (SG&A) expenses which utilized slicers for data filtering so the user could pick the view best for their needs. It was a rewarding experience to hear my team's feedback and how they might be able to integrate my models into their daily work.

## What is Enterprise FP&A?



Allie Rosen: End of Internship Presentation

## Enterprise FP&A's Role



INTRODUCTIONS | MY TEAM | PROJECT | TAKEAWAYS | Q & A

Allie Rosen: End of Internship Presentation

Slides from my End of Internship Presentation that explained what Enterprise FP&A is and what the team's responsibilities are.

## Journal Entries

### WEEK 1: Spectacular

5/30-6/2

The internship started with Shareholder's Week, in which Walmart and Sam's Club associates from around the world all gathered in Bentonville, AR. This first week included a mix of intern-only events and events with all Walmart associates. On the first night, all Walmart interns went to Top Golf. This was a great opportunity to meet interns in other programs aside from AFDP. The next day, we went to an outdoor carnival exclusively for the Walmart associates with amusement park rides, local vendors, and a huge Walmart sample store to try out new products. The highlight of the week was the Associate's Shareholders Celebration at Bud Walton Arena. It included performances from Shania Twain, Pitbull, and Snoop Dog. Finally, I attended a meet and greet at The Momentary with only interns in the AFDP program. **The week was an excellent kick-off to the summer and left me feeling positive and excited to be working for Walmart.**



Exciting moments at the Associate's Shareholders Celebration at Bud Walton Arena.

### WEEK 2: Immerse

6/5-6/9

While the first week included many exciting moments, I did not get integrated into my office or team until Week 2. Monday and Tuesday were training days in which everyone in the AFDP learned about what would be expected over the summer. Monday was at Sam's Club Home office and Tuesday was at the Walmart Home Office. I took a tour of each building and saw where I will be sitting this summer. Tuesday afternoon, I finally met my manager and the rest of the Enterprise FP&A team I will be working with. After briefly getting to know everyone, the team gave me a virtual "scavenger hunt" to practice looking through the tools I will eventually use on my summer project. They also allowed me to tag-along and attend all their regularly scheduled meetings. I did not fully understand what was going on during the meetings because I still haven't picked up on so many abbreviations and verbiage that are used regularly around the office. However, I was grateful to be included and make steps toward understanding the office

lexicon better. I also had my first weekly 1-1 with one of my assigned peer mentors, Nancy. Per instruction from the intern program, I began scheduling meetings with people I would like to network with. I attended the first “AFDP Friday,” which included data training and an excursion to Crystal Bridges. **Although it was daunting at times, the first opportunities to fully immerse myself in the program arose this week.**



Fellow interns Peyton, Jackson, and I before our first official day in the office.

### **WEEK 3: Network** **6/12-6/16**

This week I had the opportunity to meet with my second assigned mentor, a senior professional, gaining valuable guidance and insights. My manager, Hallie, provided a thorough explanation of my summer project, offering clarity on the goals and expectations. I will be building semantic models that automate views executive leadership sees each month. It is a crazy thought that I am working with the same materials used by Walmart’s CEO and CFO to make extreme decisions regarding Walmart’s future. Exploring the food sampling kitchen and participating in a Walmart Distribution Center tour added a hands-on element to this week’s experience, providing insights into different facets of the company’s operations. Although I am still finding team meetings challenging to understand, I proactively asked questions for clarification afterwards. After I attended a Women in Finance meeting with my manager, the team agreed to involve me in a more significant capacity in an upcoming event. Additionally, I connected with a tech finance professional via Zoom, seeking assistance to kickstart progress on my project. The week culminated with the privilege of hearing CEO Doug McMillon speak at the executive speaker series. He is an excellent public speaker and spoke about the importance of this for continued success in the corporate world. An all-intern networking event at the end of the week allowed me to build relationships with fellow interns. This diverse range of activities contributed to my overall growth and engagement in the internship. **I have started to find my footing in the office and on my team and have started to build a network.**



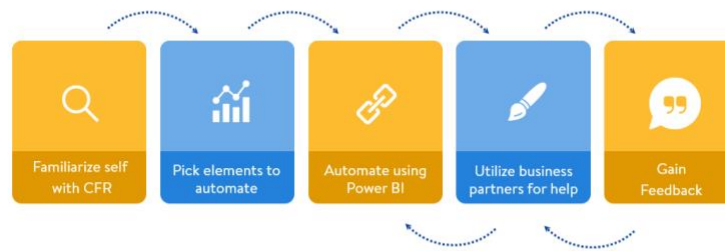
A few interns and I on our tour of a Walmart Distribution Center.

#### **WEEK 4: Challenge**

**6/19-6/23**

This week was the most productive one so far. I began by touring the Bentonville temple with other interns, gaining cultural insights, and broadening my understanding of the local environment. I met with my team's tech business partner again because I had more questions about how to make progress on my summer project. I have been struggling to learn how to use Power BI, which is the program I am supposed to build my project on. I followed the meeting up by asking a member of my team, Noah, for clarification on some topics that were covered. Engaging in project work afterwards allowed me to apply the knowledge and insights gained from these interactions. Additionally, I had meaningful discussions with my assigned mentors and other professionals, further expanding my network and learning from experienced individuals. The week concluded with the first AFDP case study competition. My team's collaborative efforts led to a commendable second-place finish. This week's bonding event was at the rodeo. It provided a fun and social atmosphere, making this week well-rounded. **This was the first week I thoroughly dove into my summer project, and while I am nervous about its complexity, I am ready for the challenge.**

## My Project – The Process



A slide from my End of Internship Presentation that explains the steps I took when tackling my summer project.

### WEEK 5: Development

6/26-6/30

The week started out intense when I shared the progress I have made on my project with the team in an informal presentation. I gathered with the four other members of my team in a conference room and presented what I have achieved so far. They provided valuable feedback. One main point of feedback was that I need to work on my financial acumen when presenting data. They were pleased with my progress though, and I plan to integrate the feedback from the meeting in the coming week. The commitment to regular check-ins reflects a collaborative approach to project work I have noticed on my team. In addition to project-related activities, I continued to actively network with individuals in positions of interest and sought guidance from those who could contribute to the success of my summer project. While attending meetings with my team, I noticed a growing comprehension of the discussions, though challenges in understanding certain topics continued. Despite this, I remain proactive in seeking clarity and learning from these interactions. The week concluded on a positive note with an intern bonding event: a Willie Nelson concert. **This week of my internship was marked by ongoing professional development and I can feel a strong bond forming with my coworkers and fellow interns.**

### WEEK 6: Advance

7/3-7/7

This week I went to a tour of Sam's Club with all the other AFDP interns, gaining insights into the retail environment and operations. The week included the excitement of a second case study competition, providing opportunities for problem-solving and collaborative efforts within my assigned team. This week, my team did not mesh as well as we did in the first case study, and we did not place. A mid-internship evaluation allowed for reflection on achievements and areas for growth. I was pleased to hear the team is very happy with my work ethic and the progress I have made so far. They had a few points of constructive criticism that I am eager to work on in the upcoming second half of the internship. I also made significant progress on assignments related to the Women in Finance event that I have been included in for preparation and planning related responsibilities. We concluded our sixth week with a team bonding event—a pickleball

tournament—encouraging teamwork among the interns. **This week had a balance of experiential learning and progress, and I feel like my confidence in my work at the office is continuing to advance.**

### **WEEK 7: Familiarity**

**7/10-7/14**

The week included a second project progress check-in on my project, where I received more feedback from my team. Encouragingly, I learned that I was on the right track and in the final stages of completion. I have completed one of two deliverables that I hope to finish by the end of the summer. The first is an automated version of one of the main views shown to executive leadership each month. I still have trouble grasping that I am seeing the same material as such important Walmart executives. I had another productive meeting with the tech business partner who is helping me with elements of my project on Power BI. This week's intern bonding event was a hike. We did not last long because it was excruciatingly hot outside. Another highlight of the week was a University of Arkansas student and alumni lunch for current Walmart finance interns and full-time employees. It was great to share what I have been working on with some of the professionals who recruited me for the internship last fall. **Although there are still challenges and conversations I do not understand within the team each day, I have begun to feel a level of familiarity within the office.**



Walmart finance and accounting professionals who are University of Arkansas students or alumni at a networking event.

### **WEEK 8: Realization**

**7/17-7/21**

This week I attended the Women in Finance event that my manager, other female leaders, and myself have been working on the entire summer. I am grateful to have been able to watch it progress and result in an empowering event. I also had a valuable networking meeting with

Rhiannon, a Vice President and inspiring female leader at Walmart. Her insights and encouragement left me with a newfound confidence, and I even contemplated accepting a full-time position if offered—a sentiment I hadn't felt before. I dedicated time to making final edits on my summer project, and in preparation for the end-of-internship presentation, I outlined the slides I want in the deck. However, I recognized a challenge ahead, as some project details are confidential, adding a layer of complexity to the presentation preparation. I want to show my peers and their managers that I have completed a successful summer project but cannot show them any of the actual deliverables from my project. **My realization this week of the extreme potential a career at Walmart in the full-time AFDP program has for my future was the highlight of my internship so far.**

### **WEEK 9: Inspired**

**7/24-28**

As the internship begins to wrap up, I spent most of this week working on my presentation. I will present in front of all my fellow interns, their managers, and any other guests I choose to invite. This will take place in the large Walmart Home Office auditorium. I am a bit nervous, but also excited to display my public speaking skills in front of my peers. I attended a session to learn about the new home office Walmart is building. It is going to be much more luxurious with many more windows and better food options. This week's intern bonding event allowed us to tour apartment buildings that current Walmart employees a couple years older than us live in. Another highlight was a meeting all University of Arkansas AFDP interns had with Sam's Club CFO, Brandi Joplin. She is a proud Razorback alumnus and was looking to hear how we could help improve the intern program in the future. **After learning about the bright future ahead for Walmart, I am feeling inspired that a full-time position in this program is what might be the best next step for me.**

### **WEEK 10: Preparation**

**7/31-8/4**

The highlight of my final traditional week of the internship was the interns vs. execs baseball game. Watching CEO Doug McMillon and CFO John-David Rainey compete against interns I am close friends with was an exciting experience. I also had the opportunity to have a 1-1 meeting with the CFO of Corporate Walmart, Christine Allen. She was extremely interesting to talk to and gave me great advice. We got along well, and I had mentioned that I was about to practice my end-of-internship presentation to the rest of my team if she would like to join. She enthusiastically agreed. My first mock-presentation went extraordinarily well. Team members gave constructive feedback, but I was encouraged by their abundance of compliments. Lastly, the intern program put on "AFDP Olympics," which was essentially a field day for AFDP interns. I came out victorious in the limbo competition. Next week is presentation week. **I am nervous but feeling confident I will give a strong end-of-internship presentation since I have been preparing for weeks.**



Fellow interns Jackson, Peyton, and I at AFDP Olympics.

### **WEEK 11: Grateful**

**8/7-8/11**

This week marked the culmination of my internship with a series of impactful events. I observed all my fellow interns present their summer accomplishments during this presentation week. Despite feeling nervous, my own presentation went well, particularly during the Q&A portion, where I handled questions adeptly. To express gratitude, I sent thank-you emails to all my mentors and individuals I met with over the summer. The week concluded with an end-of-internship banquet where we were able to spend a final evening with one another. On the final official day of my internship, unexpectedly, during a breakfast with my team, they offered me a full-time position for the next year. **The surprise element, especially since I thought it was just a breakfast meeting, made receiving a full-time offer particularly significant and exciting.**



The Enterprise FP&A team after I completed my End of Internship Presentation.



Fellow interns Peyton and Briana and I with one of our internship program planners, Kirsten, at the end-of-internship banquet.

### **Application: Importance of In-Person Office Work**

During my summer project, I honed my technical abilities, expanding my proficiency in tools such as Power BI and Excel. These skills, vital for my upcoming transition to a full-time role, were not acquired through self-study or online resources but were greatly augmented by the in-person guidance and mentorship I received from my colleagues. Working side by side with experienced professionals allowed me to navigate complex technical challenges, seek clarification when needed, and ultimately, produce a solution that automates a view that executive leadership uses each month to see Walmart's financial progress.

The success I achieved in this project underscores the central theme of my summer experience: the indispensable nature of in-person interactions for effective learning and professional growth. Whether seeking guidance from mentors, collaborating with team members, or overcoming obstacles, the ability to engage with others face-to-face proved to be instrumental. While virtual communication has its merits, the depth of social interaction and collaboration facilitated by in-person interactions cannot be replicated in a remote setting. In delving deeper into this topic, I explored various credible sources, which further solidified my understanding of the importance of physical presence in the workplace. I aim to highlight the numerous benefits of working in-person, drawing from both personal experience and scholarly research to underscore the critical role it plays in fostering individual and organizational success.

#### ***Social Interaction and Sense of Belonging***

A main reason why I found working in the office valuable was for the social interactions that led to a sense of belonging. In-person work offers invaluable benefits for team dynamics, employee engagement, and organizational culture. Research underscores that maintaining strong team dynamics is more challenging in a remote work environment, which can ultimately impact productivity and morale (Done, 2022). Brower (2021) explained how the "X-factor" of shared experiences and engagement with colleagues enhances morale and job satisfaction. Face-to-face interactions develop trust, respect, and camaraderie among team members, leading to stronger interpersonal relationships and a deeper sense of belonging (Moseley, n.d.). Over the summer, I developed a personal connection with each member of my Enterprise FP&A team. This allowed me to feel more comfortable sharing my thoughts and asking questions which quickened the progress of integrating myself into the team's workload. Working in the office provides opportunities for employees to build connections and foster a sense of community, contributing to a positive work environment.

Markman (2021) wrote how the office environment serves as a hub for cultural reinforcement, where organizational values are not just communicated but lived and experienced, further solidifying employees' connection to company culture. Walmart claims "culture is the foundation of everything we do" (*Walmart core values*, 2024). This shined through during my internship when I witnessed friendships in the office and how synthesized all levels of the office hierarchy were with one another. Research also shows that face-to-face interactions in the office play a crucial role in maintaining physical and emotional health by releasing feel-good chemicals like oxytocin, reducing stress hormones, and improving overall wellbeing (Brower, 2021). The sense of belonging and social identity cultivated through in-person work leads to greater fulfillment and satisfaction, highlighting the irreplaceable value of physical presence in the workplace.

#### ***Collaboration***

Another example of the numerous advantages of in-person work is collaboration, particularly in innovation, creativity, and productivity. A study indicated that face-to-face

collaboration facilitates the exchange of diverse perspectives, leading to the generation of more innovative ideas and solutions. Additionally, chance encounters in the office can spark serendipitous collaborations and opportunities that may not arise in remote work settings (Markman, 2021). On a weekly basis, a member of my Enterprise FP&A team would have a question that required knowledge from another individual or team in the finance department. They would physically walk to that other team's location in the Walmart Home Office to ask a question and see any necessary figures on the other person's computer. I was often excited when a member of my team needed to do this because I tagged along and enjoyed the interactions with other teams. Oftentimes, I would make a connection with one of these people I met and meet with them later in the week to learn more about their job. These spontaneous interactions not only bolstered my network but also enhanced the overall atmosphere of the office.

My experiences interacting with other finance teams in the Walmart Home Office support what Calfy (2023) explained about how in-person communication plays a vital role in reducing misunderstandings and promoting clearer communication. Face-to-face meetings tend to be more productive and efficient, as they allow for real-time discussions and problem-solving. My team members could have chosen to write other financial teams an email, but decided going to their desks in-person would be more efficient. This streamlined workflow ultimately leads to increased productivity by minimizing duplication of efforts and enabling teams to accomplish tasks quickly (Moseley, n.d.). The physical workspace provides an environment where collaboration and teamwork thrive, resulting in heightened creativity, problem-solving abilities, and overall performance (Brower, 2021). I witnessed each of these benefits come to life during my internship and truly think many of my team's successes were results of being in-person and sitting next to one another.

### ***Career Advancement Opportunities***

In-person work offers significant advantages for career advancement and receiving feedback, particularly in terms of visibility and opportunities for professional growth. Research highlights that visibility in the office plays a crucial role in opening career prospects and advancement opportunities that may not be as readily available in remote work environments (Markman, 2021). Being physically present allows individuals to showcase their skills, contributions, and potential to decision-makers and leaders within the organization (Brower, 2021). This increased visibility can lead to greater recognition, networking opportunities, and ultimately, career progression. When networking with individuals throughout the office, I often asked how they ended up in their current position. I heard numerous explanations where a promotion was earned primarily because they had a connection with someone higher up on the totem pole that was able to pull on their behalf. These sorts of connections with individuals on other teams are more difficult to come by in remote settings. According to Markman, "Face-to-face interactions facilitate mentorship, knowledge sharing, and skill development, contributing to both personal and professional growth" (2021). I saw this unfold firsthand over the summer. The mentors I learned from and questions I was able to ask simply would not have been possible had I been in a remote situation.

### ***Work-Life Balance***

Another benefit of working in-person has to do with maintaining a healthy work-life balance. While some assume this is more easily achieved when working remotely, on the contrary, in-person work offers distinct advantages in achieving this balance. With clear boundaries between work and home life, employees can more effectively compartmentalize their responsibilities, allowing for dedicated time and energy for both work and personal pursuits.

Research suggests that remote work often blurs these boundaries, leading to longer hours, heightened stress levels, and difficulties disconnecting from work obligations (Done, 2022). The lack of separation between professional and personal spaces can encroach on personal time, contributing to burnout and decreased well-being. When I left the office at the end of the workday, I could symbolically close the chapter on work-related tasks and focus on rejuvenating activities outside of work. Remote work does not allow this since personal activities like laundry, cooking, and cleaning, can theoretically take place throughout the day.

## **Key Learnings**

In reflection, my internship with Walmart's AFDP left me with a profound set of key takeaways that will undoubtedly shape my academic and professional journey moving forward. First and foremost, the importance of simplicity in communication became glaringly evident. Witnessing my team's ability to distill complex financial information into succinct slide decks for executive leaders, often comprising just 3-4 slides, emphasized the power of brevity. The second crucial lesson centered around attention to detail. I observed my team's rigorous checks and verifications to avoid even the slightest numerical error, recognizing the potential implications. Additionally, I learned the art of stress management and the significance of continuous learning. Rather than fixating on the outcome of my summer project, my focus shifted to making incremental progress each day. This philosophy was reinforced by my manager's simple yet insightful question at the end of each workday: "What is something you learned today?" Lastly, the internship underscored the importance of collaboration in navigating the vast landscape of a company like Walmart. Seeking assistance and insights beyond the confines of my immediate team emerged as a fundamental strategy for project success and personal growth. Together, these takeaways form a robust foundation that will undoubtedly guide my future endeavors in both academic pursuits and professional aspirations.

## **Recommendations**

I highly recommend this internship to eligible students. The opportunity to work on a summer project that contributes significantly to a team's goals ensures a meaningful learning experience. With no busy work, this internship allows interns to dive into real-world projects and make a tangible impact. Additionally, it offers an exceptional balance between work and professional development, with Fridays dedicated to team building and supplemental learning. I also appreciated the accommodation at Embassy Suites, which was a generous and comfortable living experience. Lastly, the reliability and stability of Walmart as a retail giant and the largest company in the world further reinforced the value of this opportunity.

For those planning to base their thesis on their internship experience, I recommend capturing the journey through pictures. Documenting the workspace, office environment, moments from the Executive Speaker Series, and other significant events not only would enrich the thesis but also preserved valuable memories. Visual aids provide a deeper understanding and add authenticity.

## **Limitations**

1. Confidentiality constraints: My summer project undertaken during my internship involved sensitive information, resulting in limitations on the level of detail that could be shared. Due to confidentiality constraints, specific details, models, and explanations beyond a general overview of the project could not be disclosed. At the beginning of the internship, I underwent multiple confidentiality trainings that ingrained this mindset. This constraint may have impacted the depth of analysis and discussion.
2. Limited visual documentation: The absence of extensive visual documentation poses a limitation on the presentation of my journal entries. While more pictures could have provided valuable insights into the daily activities and environments of my internship, the reluctance to disrupt professional dynamics by excessive phone use hindered my

collection of appropriate pictures. As the youngest member of the office, concerns about perceptions of excessive phone usage and photography influenced this behavior.

## **Conclusion**

My internship with Walmart's AFDP was a transformative experience, offering invaluable insights into the dynamics of finance and accounting within a corporate giant. The collaborative culture, emphasis on simplicity, attention to detail, and the importance of continuous learning are lessons that will undoubtedly shape my academic and professional journey moving forward. I look back on my internship and feel accomplished, knowing I successfully built a semantic model that the Enterprise FP&A can use and develop in their daily work. The discourse surrounding the importance of in-person office work unveils a multifaceted narrative that shows many benefits to being physically present in the office. From honing technical skills under the guidance of mentors to fostering a sense of community and belonging through social interactions, the tangible benefits of physical presence resonate with my experience deeply. While navigating the evolving landscape of work dynamics after COVID-19, it becomes increasingly evident that while virtual work and communication hold merit, the depth and richness of in-person interactions remain unparalleled. When looking forward to my future full-time job that resulted from this Accounting and Finance Development Program internship, I remain grateful that this job is in-person and am excited to benefit from the growth, connections, and fulfillment that are inevitable.

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