I had an amazing internship at Altman Plants through the Vic and Margaret Ball Internship program! My program coordinator, Candice Musgrove, helped find the right location for me, got in contact with them, and was vital in setting everything up. She was a really great help, checking in on me and asking if I had any questions during the whole process.

I spent three months at the Peyton location of Altman Plants in Colorado. There, I got to spend time with every department—propagation, growing team, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), availability, transportation, planting line, and maintenance. This was one big learning experience that complemented and strengthened everything I’ve learned during my time studying at the University of Wisconsin River Falls. I was able to truly experience every step in the large scale production of a crop. While learning all of these things, I was able to hone my data collection and input skills through constantly taking, entering, and interpreting EC and pH values for crops. I also worked with many of the H2A and local employees. Being in such a culturally diverse workplace was also a new learning experience for me. Both of these things will be very useful for my future career in horticulture, as I was able to broaden my horizons with this opportunity and grow both in the hard skills as well as the soft skills needed in the industry.

Every day I was working hands-on in the greenhouse doing jobs like taking EC and pH readings, pinching young plants, sticking cuttings, and collecting chrysanthemum height data. I was also one of the main people working in the trial garden. I inventoried in the spring, chose where to plant new varieties, and tended to the garden all summer. This year’s CNGA barbeque will be held at the Peyton location and many people will see the work in the trial garden that I am proud of.

My special project was a natural day length trial where I studied when every different cultivar present flowered under natural days compared to blackout conditions. This was specific to the Peyton location in the hopes that they could put mums with similar photoperiodic requirements together, forgo the movement into a blackout house, and cut down on labor. I recorded the crop ID numbers, movement date (into blackout or natural day), last PGR application date, first bud date, and open flower date for both the blackout and natural day groups. We had some issues, though, as this year’s cuttings of certain cultivars from Dummen flowered abnormally early for both groups. Next year, I’m sure there will be another trial to see how those cultivars will perform. This special project was a great opportunity for me to learn more about chrysanthemums and how to run a large trial.
I thought that the Altman Plants group was a great host. The apartments were nice, as was the option of taking the bus to work every day. The variable hours were difficult to adjust to at first, as they were just coming out of the busy season. As I got used to the facility and things slowed down, the hours became more stable eight hour work days, but sometimes being nine
and a half to compensate during a busy week. At that point, I really didn’t mind. I could have left after eight hours every day if I had driven my car, but instead opted for the bus.

On August eighth, my internship and college advisor, Dr. Sonja Maki, visited me at Altman Plants. I gave her a tour of the facility and showed her my special natural day length project. She even helped me carry a pot of mums over to the trial area! I got to bring her to the
trial garden, which was nice to have a fellow Wisconsinite be equally shocked as me at the weather extremes that Peyton experiences. She met with the Assistant Head Grower, Andrew Melton, and the General Manager, Bobby Steinlein. We finished our day with a tour from Andrew, where we talked all about irrigation, crop development responses, space planning, and how the Peyton location handles these challenges. It was really great to have Dr. Maki visit and I’d like to thank the American Floral Endowment for helping make that happen.

Dr. Maki and Me During Her Visit

This internship experience has been massively beneficial to my career path. I’ve learned that while large scale greenhouse production isn’t the path I want to go down, I enjoyed my time collecting data, taking measurements, and working with the trial garden during my internship. This has led me to a more research-based career path. Currently, I have work set up for this coming school year where I will be working at a biodiagnostics lab doing seed testing! I know there will be more opportunities in trial gardens and research greenhouses in my future where the knowledge and experience I gained at Altman Plants will prove invaluable.
I want to extend my most sincere thanks to all of the people at the American Floral Endowment who have made this experience possible. The Vic and Margaret Ball Internship Program has been instrumental in my career in horticulture and for that I am forever grateful.