

## Job Experience Is Valuable

### Internships Are A Good Way For Young Workers To Get To Know Area Employers, And Vice Versa

BY WENDY PAGE

There has often been a Catch-22 for job seekers: You can't get a job without experience, and you can't get experience without a job.

One way around this conundrum is through internships.

Students are put to work doing everything from research and writing to telephone and computer work. Whether receiving college credit, a salary, or no pay at all, the experience of working in a real-world business environment can be priceless to a student.

"Some lessons must be experienced to be learned," said Matthew Zinman who formed Z University.org, a work force readiness company based out of Pennsylvania dedicated to internship excellence. His goal, he said, is "to show employers how to raise the quality of internship programs."

Tim Lahey, director of career services at Adirondack Community College in Queensbury, said his message to students "is that internships offer a great experience, an opportunity to make connections, they frequently turn into real jobs... There's no better way to explore a career in a way that doesn't require a long-term commitment."

Thomas Corigliano, director of the SUNY Plattsburgh Extension Center, believes there are "students who decide on their career direction based on faulty information, based on what they see on TV and in movies." An internship may set them straight.

Siena College School of Business, an undergraduate liberal arts college in Albany, offers both credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing internships. James Nolan, dean of the school, said the internship program "definitely is part of why students choose our school. The strength of our program is that our staff has business experience to bring into the classroom. The emphasis is not just on the theory of business, but the practice.

"Over 90 percent of our graduates go to work full time upon graduation. We're preparing them to enter the work force."

Having experience in the business world adds a level of well-roundedness and work-readiness to a college degree.

No matter what the job is, from working in a restaurant in the summer to working for a big company like GE, Nolan tells students to think about what skills they are learning that they can sell to an employer.

"They're developing a skill set from that experience. Teamwork, for example," he said.

He also tells them to notice "things like dining etiquette, dress etiquette, networking skills, how to approach someone, the use of business cards - things you don't learn in a classroom or textbook but that are vital to

success in business."

ACC has a number of different internships. There is a public service internship available that offers students an opportunity to earn college credit for community service.

"It was designed because we didn't have something like it in this area," Lahey said, "for human services, public services, education, government - basically, non-profit organizations."

He said ACC has an intern in the State Assembly full time in Albany. The student is interested in government and is exploring the possibilities.

"Our programs have built-in internships," Lahey said. "These are opportunities for students in our vocational programs to work in a business."

At Siena College, Nolan said, "internships are very highly recommended" and some employers won't interview a student, even with good grades, if they have not interned.

"We actually talk to our freshman students and tell them that in the next four years, you're building your resume," Nolan said. "There are non-credit internships even their first year."

When students have completed their junior year, Siena has a credit program of supervised internships.

Zinman said an internship works best when the business or employer utilizes the intern properly.

"The student knows what he or she can do," said Zinman. "Their energy is contagious, boundless. They've got those ideals. How incredibly capable they are. These are not peons; these are not gophers. These are emerging professionals."

Students bring with them the latest and often advanced knowledge of their industry, especially in terms of technology. They are ready and eager to apply their knowledge and theories to practical situations.

An intern can offer a new perspective, a new pair of eyes, and, perhaps, his or her background can add an uncharted layer to a company.

For a business, utilizing interns can increase its productivity. The cost is minimal, and in productivity it pays for itself exponentially.

Zinman has introduced program management tools - Intern Toolkit is one - for businesses to follow to manage successful internship programs. The onus, he believes, is on the business side.

"Employers who do have internship programs, the colossal mistake is waiting until the student comes on board to see what they will do," Zinman said. Before they recruit, "they should take inventory, define what resources they have and are needed, and that will set the course on productivity."

Zinman holds the business accountable to provide the intern practical work.

Zinman said its a myth that it takes too much time to run a successful program. "They don't have the time not to have interns," he countered.

It may be true that large companies use internships for recruitment, whereas smaller companies utilize them for productivity, but either way, Zinman said, it's a win-win situation.

"A company of one can run an effective internship program," Zinman said. He stressed that an intern can come in and, like in a classroom, learn what they need to do and be sent off to accomplish their assignments.

"Small to mid-size companies feel they don't have tools to do this. They don't know what they're missing. And that's a real travesty," Zinman said.

Siena has 400 internship sites.

"They're all over the map," Nolan said, "from the big GE to a two-person accounting firm, to an entrepreneur. We have relationships with them, and with non-profit companies, too." Siena also has an international program where students combine studying abroad with an internship.

Zinman said schools should make internships mandatory. "There's no test, no paper, no lecture that can substitute for real world experience. It is up to an employer to give it to them."

Although SUNY Plattsburgh refers to many of its internships as field experience, "our programs do indeed include internships by

one name or another," said Corigliano. Student teaching experience is required for both SUNY Plattsburgh's degree programs as well as for certification by the state.

"For different purposes, an internship for a high school senior, for example, is more for them to test the experience to determine if they want to spend the rest of their life doing this. For our program, it's a professional component for training purposes," he said.

At the high school, college and graduate levels, there are often programs that counsel students on practices such as resume writing, interviewing skills, and writing a cover letter. Through ACC's Career Services, there is an e-mail-based mentoring program with alumni and other professionals.

At Siena College, for each field of study there is an academic internship coordinator. They have a 48-hour resume critique service, and a handout "Ten Tips for Finding Internships." Sometimes, Nolan said, "we have business people come in to discuss the transition between college and the business world."

The hot topic concerning internships is the compensation issue. Zinman said "ultimately, students should be paid." Otherwise, internships can be "kind of legalized slave labor," he said.

for an internship, Corigliano said. "It's part of the course requirement."

In programs other than teaching, internships are optional, and can be arranged for credit and built into an existing course, or arranged for monetary compensation.

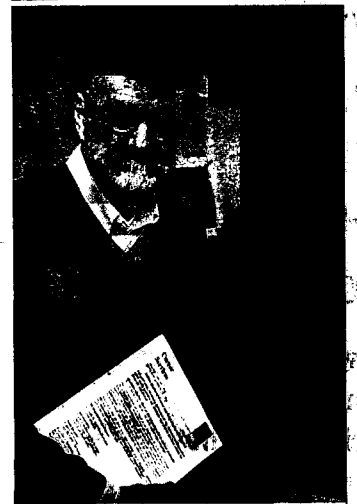
"During the school year," Nolan said, "approximately 20 percent of internships are paid. However, in the summer, 95 percent are paid."

A lesson that may be learned through an internship is that a student's chosen field is not actually appealing.

"That is just as good as realizing you love this profession and getting a job offer," Nolan said. "You've saved a lot of time and can go a different route."

Nolan said that some of his students intern for one big company and one smaller company, or one for-profit and one non-profit. This helps them choose which direction to go.

"It's been good how many students have got 10 jobs through the system," Lahey said. □



Tim Lahey at ACC in Queensbury says internships can turn into full-time jobs.

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