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Internships Shape Students' Future Careers

By Maria Arrayan

In 2018, McGraw-Hill Education reported that only 4 in 10 U.S. college students feel well-prepared to go into the workforce.¹ Why is this number so low? Anna, a BYU pre-business student, is one of the 60 percent of students who feel this way.

Anna feels less confident about her professional future because she lacks professional work experience in her chosen major. She fears that if she does not have the experience needed for a full-time job, her post-graduation career options will be limited.

Anna is only one of thousands of students who feel this way. Consequently, all students (including Anna) should be doing internships throughout their college years. After all, internships are the best way for students to put their feet into their field's door and get the necessary experience before graduation.

Although internships are helpful for students, many students don't know of the benefits of internships and the impact they can bring to the students' careers, often because they fail to use campus or other resources to find internships. According to McGraw-Hill Education, fewer than 50% of U.S. college students aren't taking advantage of campus career resources such as career fairs, career advisors, résumé support, and especially internships; however, those who do take advantage of these resources rank them as extremely helpful in their career search.²

However, there are other significant obstacles that make finding internships difficult, especially the need to work paid jobs. College students are anecdotally labeled as "broke" for a reason; many of them need an income to help pay their expenses, and wouldn't be able to afford spending a couple of months doing an unpaid job. Another obstacle is the scarcity of internship opportunities for people majoring in the liberal arts and other fields, and the subsequent difficulty in finding them.

Even though internship opportunities are scarce for some majors, students should try their best to find an internship by using campus resources. When students take advantage of these resources, they have more opportunities to find an internship and obtain the professional work experience they need to get their first job. The Gallup and Strada Education Network reports that almost 50% of students that speak often with faculty or staff about their future careers (and have proactive conversations) report

higher levels of confidence about having the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in the job market and workplace.³ These findings emphasize the importance of using campus resources to find internships.

Internships have a powerful positive impact on students' careers

Internships bring practical, hands-on benefits to college students as they prepare to graduate and find a full-time job. When students get internships, many benefits come from the internships, such as 1) work experience, 2) professional skills, and 3) full-time job offers.

Work Experience

Employers are looking for students who have previous professional experience and an impressive résumé. Eric Schmidt, former Google CEO, believes that companies that care about winning will focus on bringing in the best and most diverse talent, and that such companies will offer these employees a place where they can grow and reach their full potential.⁴ Employers want to find experienced people who are willing to learn but also bring value to the company.

However, gaining professional work experience can be hard for college students because of school demands and lack of time. Anna felt that she didn't have enough work experience. Because she was constantly busy with school, she focused all her time on doing homework and studying for exams, and didn't put time into looking for an internship. One of the classes that Anna was taking was Career Development, where her professor talked about the importance of getting an internship. At that point, Anna realized that she had to set time aside to look for an internship. Even though Anna understood that doing any internship would help her get work experience, she still wanted to get a paid internship so she could pay her expenses. According to journalist Tierna Unruh-Enos, "Getting experience in the field is important, but so is eating and paying your bills."⁵

The best way to get professional work experience and not starve while in college is by doing paid internships. These internships prepare students to gain professional work experience while they are still in college; internships also help students be qualified candidates for any job in their chosen field.

Besides, more and more internships are becoming paid because workers in America are covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act, which defines paid and unpaid internships. If an intern is getting both educational and practical work experience and does not have an expectation for compensation, unpaid internships are legal. However, if interns are performing work for free that displaces other employees'

paid jobs, the internship is probably not legal.⁶ Knowing these labor standards can help students to know their rights at the moment of looking for paid or unpaid internships.

Getting an internship is key for any student to get valuable experience. Both paid and unpaid internships help students to build a strong foundation of work experience and skills. These internships can be found through campus resources, since there are many startup companies that contact universities to recruit students to help with specific sections of their business.

Professional Skills

Internships help students develop professional skills that are essential for full-time jobs and that employers are looking for in their new hires. For example, Rider University surveyed its accounting students about their experiences with internships; Table 1 below shows the skills that these students reportedly developed.⁷

My Accounting Internship	Mean Response (out of 5)
Was a valuable experience	4.82
Provided networking opportunities	4.8
Provided new abilities with audit, tax, or accounting software	4.68
Improved my time management	4.64
Developed my confidence to work as an accounting professional	4.61
Improved my use of judgement	4.6
Enhanced my understanding of accounting/audit/tax concepts taught in class	4.57
Improved my Excel or data analytics skills	4.57
Developed my oral communication	4.5
Improved my written communication skills	4.29

Table 1 Reported benefits of accounting internships Source: Pennsylvania CPA journal

These results show that the accounting students developed or improved skills such as time management skills, analytical skills, and communication skills as a result of their internships.

In addition, the students had the chance to apply what they learned in their college classes, which helped students to better understand better their career path through an experiential learning process. Furthermore, the accounting students built confidence in their skills as they put them into practice in their respective internships.

Anna wanted to build professional skills; therefore, she decided to get an unpaid internship that also counted for college credit, otherwise known as an on-campus internship. These internships help students to receive academic credit while gaining valuable real-life work experience, and they also help companies by providing them with the equivalent of full-time work with a part-time team of college interns.

Anna helped the Brides company with its social media channels and website. As she did marketing research to boost Instagram followers, she developed professional skills, and as she prepared to present the finished projects to the company's owner, she became a better presenter. In the process, she both grew professionally and received college credit from her unpaid internship.

Developing professional work skills and confidence through internships will help students be prepared for a smoother and more realistic transition from school to the workplace.

Full-time Job Offers

Internships provide students not only with professional skills but also with opportunities to get a full-time job. If students perform well in their internships, their employers may offer them a full-time job position upon graduation. The National Association of Colleges and Employers found through a survey that “more than half of all graduating seniors who applied for a full-time job—53.2%—received at least one job offer. Within this group, 57.5% of students who had an internship and 43.7% of graduating seniors who did not have an internship received a job offer.”⁸

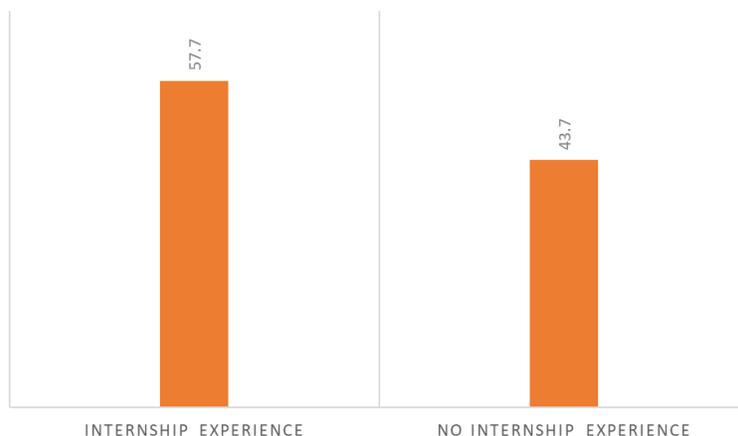


Figure 1 Proportion of job offers received | Source: NACE

As seen in Figure 1, students who have done one or more internships have a 14% higher change of getting one or more job offers upon graduation. Clearly, internships can help students finish their last year of school with less stress and find ways to keep developing skills that will help them in their professional careers.

As explained before, internships are essential for students; in fact, students can't afford to finish school without an internship already done. However, how can students find internships? Networking, career fairs, networking meetings, and online resources are some tools that students can use to find internship opportunities.

Networking

The phrase "It is not what you know but who you know" describes perfectly the purpose of networking. Networking is the key to work opportunities because recruiters will more readily trust a job candidate referral if it's from an employee in the same recruiter's company.

Students may not feel confident in asking an unknown employee at a given company to refer them for a job position because they haven't developed a relationship. However, students should take the initiative to start networking with professors and attending business trips, school activities, and club activities. These resources are useful for students to expand their connections and find internship opportunities.

Networking helps students to be noticeable when applying for an internship position because it enables them to make contacts within their chosen company, with employees that know the students' work ethic and are willing to recommend them.

According to Porter & Woo, authors of *Untangling the Networking Phenomenon*, networking brings internships and full-time job opportunities; however, networking also enables students to exchange resources with others to provide social support and build trusted relationships with other colleagues.⁹ Networking is more than just making contacts; it is building a relationship that both parties will benefit from.

For example, when Anna was a student at LDS Business College, she applied for a job and obtained an interview. As she was preparing for the interview, she remembered that her accounting professor worked at that company, so she emailed him for advice. Anna's professor responded that he was the interviewer's manager and that he was going to recommend Anna for the job. Because of Anna's professor recommendation, Anna got the job. This shows that students can be successful in finding an internship as they seek opportunities to network and build relationships.

Career Fair

Another way to find internships is through career fairs. Career fairs provide students with access to representatives of many companies in one place. Most of the companies that participate in the career fairs are recruiting students either for internships or full-time jobs.

Students should take advantage of career fairs by preparing beforehand. One way that students can prepare for career fairs is researching the companies that they are interested in. Researching about the companies will help the students to come prepared with questions and, most importantly, to build a connection with the recruiters. One part of building a connection with a recruiter is making a good impression by dressing business casual when attending the career fairs.

Networking Meetings

Networking meetings, which are interviews with employees from different companies, can help students find internships. These interviews are not job interviews; they are more informative interviews where people have the chance to build connections and learn more about specific job positions, a specific company's culture, and how to prepare to be a competitive job candidate.

Nathan A. Perez and Marcia Ballinger, in their book *The 20-Minute Networking Meeting*, said that 70% of all jobs are obtained through other people, through networking.¹⁰ If students get stuck in finding an internship or don't know where to start, they should consider networking meetings because they will help them gain connections and possibly an internship opportunity.

Online Resources

If students want to broaden their internship options, they should use platforms like LinkedIn to network with recruiters or companies to find an internship. LinkedIn is the world's largest professional networking platform, and can bring many job opportunities if students know how to use it. LinkedIn has nearly 660 million users in more than 200 countries and territories as of 2020.¹¹ That's a lot of potential contacts! Through LinkedIn, students can network with recruiters and employees from different companies. By networking with different people through LinkedIn, students may have the opportunity to get recommendations or internships.

Other helpful tools include Glassdoor and Indeed, which are websites that are up-to-date with job postings from different companies. In these websites, students can find more details about specific internship positions and the interview process.

In conclusion, internships are essential because they can open doors to a successful professional career for a student. Even though internships can be hard to find, students shouldn't be fearful about trying; Anna was fearful, until she armed herself with the information necessary to get an internship. To achieve this end, students should empower themselves with information, contact friends, talk to career counselors, arrange networking meetings, and use all campus resources available. If they do, they shall not fear.

Notes

¹ Tyler Reed, "New Survey: Only 4 in 10 U.S. College Students Feel Well-Prepared for Their Future Careers; Perceptions of Preparedness Vary Widely By Gender," McGraw-Hill Education, last modified June 28, 2018, <https://www.mheducation.com/news-media/press-releases/2018-future-workforce-survey-results.html>.

² Reed, "Well-Prepared for Their Future Careers."

³ "2017 College Student Survey: A Nationally Representative of Currently Enrolled Students," Gallup and Strada Education Network, published February 20, 2018, <https://www.stradaeducation.org/press-release/new-survey-reveals-crisis-of-confidence-in-workforce-readiness-among-college-students/>.

⁴ "In disruptive times, the power comes from people: An interview with Eric Schmidt," McKinsey Digital, March 9, 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/in-disruptive-times-the-power-comes-from-people-an-interview-with-eric-schmidt>.

⁵ Tierna Unruh-Enos, "How to Get an Internship and Pay Your Bills Too," SmartAsset, published January 2, 2015, accessed March 25, 2020, <https://smartasset.com/insights/how-to-get-an-internship-and-pay-your-bills-too>.

⁶ “Fact Sheet #71: Internship Programs Under The Fair Labor Standards Act,” U.S. Department of Labor, updated January 2018, accessed March 25, 2020, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/71-flsa-internships>.

⁷ Margaret O’ Reilly-Allen and Daria Palaschak, “Internships: A Golden Opportunity from There Different Angles,” *Pennsylvania CPA journal* 89, no. 1 (2018): 32-35, <https://search-proquest-com.erl.lib.byu.edu/docview/2052762149?accountid=4488>.

⁸ “Job Offers for Class of 2019 Grads Impacted by Internship Experience,” National Association of Colleges and Employers, published May 13, 2019, <https://www.nacweb.org/job-market/trends-and-predictions/job-offers-for-class-of-2019-grads-impacted-by-internship-experience/>.

⁹ Caitlin Porter and Sang Eun Woo, “Untangling the Networking Phenomenon: A Dynamic Psychological Perspective on How and Why People Network.” *Journal of Management* 41, no. 5 (July 2015): 1477–1500, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206315582247>.

¹⁰ Nathan Perez and Marcia Ballinger, *The 20-Minute Networking Meeting* (Minneapolis: Career Innovation Press, 2015), 16.

¹¹ “About LinkedIn,” LinkedIn Corporation, accessed March 31, 2020, <https://about.linkedin.com/>.