

Alumnus writes intern article; Career Development assistant quoted

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Building working relations with institutions of higher education in the design category is one way to ensure your firm has a pipeline of new talent. Developing internships and/or coop programs with these institutions is important for a firm's future. Networking, on-campus presence, and attending career fairs are just a few ways it can be done.

Promote your firm on campus.

Most schools are willing to work with firms on an individual basis to customize an internship program that is well suited to its needs.

For example, at Alfred University in Alfred, N.Y., the School of Engineering is very reputable, so many employers actually reach out directly to them when they need to hire an intern. The recruiting coordinator will then work with them on an individual basis to determine the best method to promote their company and position they are recruiting for.

Jill Crandall, assistant director of Experiential Education at Alfred University's Career Development Center, says, "We are lucky enough to have an in-house recruiting coordinator whose responsibility is to create relationships with employers/companies."

She says this is done in a number of ways: 1) the employer visits campus and conducts interviews; 2) the school conducts a résumé collection for the employer and sends them the book of candidates; and, 3) the school posts their position on its online job board Saxon JobLink where all students know to go to if searching for an internship, co-op or full-time job.

Beyond these reactive methods of recruiting companies, the Alfred University recruiting staff also makes cold calls to employers they think would benefit from hiring the school's students.

"We also have a great database of alum currently working in the industry who come back to recruit," Crandall says.

Additionally, Alfred University holds annual career fairs in the fall and spring. In the fall the university holds the annual Engineering Career Fair, which attracts companies from all over the country.

"Many students get interviews and job/internship/co-op offers from participating in this event," Crandall says. "There is also a program called 'Employer in Residence.' We invite representatives from companies to visit campus to critique résumés, assist with interview skills, and more. This is a great way for companies to get their name out there. I would encourage companies looking to attract students to develop this type of relationship with a school in their area. They can conduct an information session, or present an undergraduate engineering seminar."

Network, network, network

Arnold Bell, executive director at the NC State University Career Development Center (CDC) in Raleigh, advises developing connections.

"The NC State University CDC is fortunate to have a well established array of partnerships through which to facilitate internship placement," Bell says. "However, when presented with the need to identify new opportunities, we turn first for assistance to our extensive network of alumni, faculty, and university researchers with industry connections. This network expands CDC's access to industry opportunities, exponentially. If additional resources become necessary, the CDC will augment the process with information from state and federal labor agencies."

So, once you have decided on what schools your firm wants to build a relationship with, follow these points to

succeed:

- Sign up to participate in campus career fairs
- Sponsor mock interview events
- Host externship visits to company work sites
- Become a resource to campus student organizations
- Establish a partnership with the campus career services office

Benefits to building an internship program.

The benefits of a successful internship program are numerous: recruiting new talent, talent with up-to-date training and knowledge, prescreening, and more.

In the National Association of Colleges and Employers “Internship & Co-op Survey,” employers revealed that nearly 40 percent of their internship and coop hires would account for their new full-time hires, which is why experiential education is so important in the overall college recruiting process. The study also revealed that employers expect to hire more college students for summer internships this year.

“Experiential education is so important in the overall college recruiting process,” Crandall says. “Internships can sometimes be looked at as an extended interview for full-time employment and give students the tools and knowledge they need to start out as successful employees once they graduate. Internships also help students to realize whether or not they are in the right field.”

Internships can also be the fuel needed for obtaining talent for new hires.

“A strong internship program can be an enormous asset to an organization,” Bell says.

For example:

- The presence of interns assures company access to a pre-screened pipeline of new talent. Potential new hires can be previewed without long-term commitments.
- An internship program can further enhance recruitment efforts by providing an effective strategy for promoting a company&s brand identity within a campus community.
- As interns return to campus, they spread the word regarding their experience to fellow students and faculty.
- Intern placements also enable the company direct access to the intellectual capital of the students& institution of learning.

Red flags

Despite all the positive aspects, there are some red flags that universities look for when it comes to intern programs. Here are some recommendations of what not to do.

“Among the more significant red flags include the use of interns as cheap labor, the absence of written-work plans, unsafe working environments, and internships which have no relevance to the student&s academic studies,” Bell says.

If word of a poorly-run program gets around, students report back to their schools and also other organizations. Building a positive program will equal a positive reputation.

“The Fair Standards Labor Act has issued a set of guidelines that employers can use to determine if their intern should be paid,” Crandall says.

At Alfred University, once a student completes an internship or co-op, he or she is given a survey that asks about the value of their experience, among other things.

“If a student gives a bad review and does not recommend that company again to another student, then I would have concerns as well, but this has not happened since I have been here,” Crandall says.