

Internships: Many Perspectives – Unlimited Benefits!



By Stephanie Lambert, manager of Student & Educator Services, BEC

Take a moment from your hectic day and remember back to your days as a student. Everywhere you turned some adult was asking you, “What do you want to do with your life?” How many of us had a clue as to what career path we wanted or what types of careers were out there? Looking back, how many of us would have appreciated an opportunity to experience first-hand a career field we were interested in? What kind of difference do you think that experience would have made in our lives? This glimpse into the future is possible for students today through internships – and the experience is priceless.

“Through my internship I gained many valuable experiences, but most valuable was the ability to experience the work environment in the field I plan to work in. I now know that I want to become an electrical engineer and with the skills I obtained I know that I will be more successful.” – Kris Krevanko, former student intern at Intel

Not only does an internship provide that first-hand perspective of a career, it is a way for students to develop essential workplace skills. The experience also provides a way for a more comprehensive understanding of industry expectations and promotes increased motivation and focus needed for students to excel within their classes. They begin to see the value of their courses rather than ask the age-old question, “Why do I need to know this?”

Student internships – the gateway to career exploration

Internships provide unique and meaningful opportunities for career exploration. Eyes and minds become open to the possibilities and the diverse career paths in which students can apply their interests, skills and talents.

“During my junior year in high school, I was accepted to participate in a summer student internship at Intel. For eight weeks, I worked alongside a unique marketing team of anthropologists and design ethnographers researching the feasibility of “computer assistants” to replace their human counterparts. I learned to research, synthesize and analyze relevant information. The internship opened my eyes to the wide array of career possibilities I had never before considered or even knew existed.” – Laura Kanter, former student intern at Intel

The power of internships

Internships are transformative. They create opportunities for students to meet and beat challenging expectations, increasing their confidence and driving continued learning and achievement.

A good example is Weinian He, a senior from Aloha High School, who worked as an intern at Intel Corporation. In spite of having very little programming experience, Weinian’s quickness and capacity to learn in addition to his aptitude for programming and systems problem solving prompted his supervisor to assign him to a very large project. Weinian met the challenge and solved a perplexing business problem using very advanced techniques. Weinian’s Intel supervisor was extremely impressed with his extraordinary work ethic and skill level that was on par with full-time junior engineers.

Educator internships

Internships aren’t solely for students, either. With the BEC’s assistance, educators have been and continue to contribute to the success of local organizations, lending their diverse set of skills, strong work ethic and deep-level knowledge towards achieving company objectives.



Malia Hite, a math teacher from Southridge High School, is a prime example of the level of work educator interns bring to the table. During Malia's six-week internship experience with Portland General Electric, she:

- Conducted a statistical analysis of pre-placement tests administered by PGE to meter reader applicants;
- Performed a review and assessment of PGE's student summer internship program;
- Planned an interactive networking event for PGE's 65 student interns; and
- Developed a basic electricity curriculum for the Oregon Building Congress' Construction Academy

Malia's accomplishments are just a few examples of the valuable work educator interns complete for their host businesses.

The benefits of first-hand perspectives



Educators like Malia receive that same valuable first-hand experience that only internships can provide. They live in the world of business during their internship time period and soak up the environment, the workplace expectations, the current changes and challenges for the company and corresponding industry in which they are placed.

"The most important thing I gained from my internship was experience with and knowledge of a work culture, industry and population about which I knew very little before. This experience has given me much food for thought, which will be shared and discussed with my students, who will find it most interesting. – Beth Hahn, Educator Intern, Tuality Health Care

With this newfound knowledge, educators go back to their classrooms in the fall renewed, reinvigorated and ready to infuse their curriculum with real-world activities to enhance the skills necessary for a competitive future workforce. They are also more in tune to career fields and can better advise their students about career choices. Bottom line – learning is made more relevant. This translates into higher expectations and improved results in the classroom.

The educator internship “trickle-down effect”



Joe Zenisek performed a variety of tasks from enhancing PGE's K-12 educational outreach program to volunteering to be Larry the Lightbulb at PGE Park on “Score One for Safety” night during his summer educator internship with Portland General Electric.

The learning didn't stop on the job – it filtered down to Joe's students in a variety of ways. He took his first-hand experience in PGE's career-rich environment to develop additional career awareness activities within his classes, including orchestrating a field trip to PGE's Wilsonville Training Center. Joe also used his internship experience to adapt his environmental science class curriculum to include more project-based and fieldwork activities centered on sustainability and other timely issues he became more aware of while working for PGE.

Internships = benefits to community

The benefits of internships to students and educators are powerful. But just as powerful is the positive impact that participating in or offering internships has on our community. Internships provide that crucial link between business and education. Through these connections our community thrives. Students become more engaged in learning, develop better work ethics and improve skills and abilities. They become dedicated employees and involved community members.

Educators involved in internships improve their skills as teachers and make learning more relevant for their students. Simply stated, our teachers are on the front lines with our future workers and community citizens. Internships provide them with the tools necessary to improve education to meet the challenges of the 21st century and a more global and competitive landscape.

Our community thrives with the increase of motivated and skilled workers and active community citizens.

Get involved

Internships are a win-win situation. If you are interested in developing internship opportunities within your organization, contact the Business Education Compact. This local non-profit firm has been creating connections between business and education for over 22 years. Participation is made easy with the help of the BEC. SAO member organizations such as Unicru, WebTrends, and Vernier Software and Technology have made this powerful connection. Join them in this important effort. Contact Stephanie Lambert at slambert@becpdx.org or 503-646-0242 x 23 to get started.

About the Business Education Compact

“Make learning real” sums up the BEC mission. For more than 20 years, the local nonprofit organization has been doing just that by connecting the classroom and workplace with hands-on, innovative learning experiences for students and teachers; by creating and leading working partnerships with business and education; and by advocating for quality education in Oregon. Learn more about the BEC at www.becpdx.org or call 503.646.0242 x23.

About the author

Stephanie Lambert is the manager of Student & Educator Services for the BEC, responsible for cultivating internship opportunities through the development of business partnerships. Stephanie's path to the BEC included both business and education experience. After working in various roles for International Gaming Technology, Stephanie pursued a teaching degree. She put her business and marketing background to use during her career as a marketing educator for Everett Public Schools where she developed internships and volunteer opportunities for her students with local businesses. Her passion to make learning real in her classroom led her to the BEC after relocating to the Portland area. Stephanie can be reached at slambert@becpdx.org.