



# Position Brief on Experiential Education

## Make Internships Mandatory

By Matthew S. Zinman, Founder, The Internship Institute

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### Capsule

A growing number of higher education institutions and academic departments within colleges require students to complete an internship or related program. This is a step in the right direction to better prepare students for future challenges. With this Position Brief, The Internship Institute asserts that the time has come to take a giant leap — **Make internships Mandatory** — and seize one of the greatest opportunities for applied learning, experiential education, workforce development, community service, economic growth, and individual prosperity.

The content below includes the Position Brief rationale along with relevant challenges, considerations, opportunities, and value propositions for students, employers and academic institutions alike. We encourage ALL parties with a vested interest in workforce readiness and related topics to engage in a dialogue to take aim and action to address these issues.

Please note that, for the purposes of this Brief, “internships” is used generically to represent all forms of experiential education. In addition, the terms “employers,” “host sites,” and “site sponsors” are referenced interchangeably, including for non-profit organizations.

### Position Rationale

As the “real world” becomes more complex, the gaps of knowledge and experience that exist between the college classroom and the workplace continue to widen. The demand for skilled labor is on the rise even more as the Baby Boomer generation retires.

Common knowledge about workforce readiness was confirmed by a recent report (10/06) led by The Conference Board, which concludes that most young people lack critical skills and are ill-prepared to enter the workforce.

Some lessons must be experienced to be learned. The good news is that academic institutions, employers, and students all share a viable opportunity to fully bridge this gap. The Internship Institute contends that internships, co-ops and related experiential education programs provide the single most effective means for students to gain practical training, apply classroom learning, and enhance career skills. This will enable them to succeed all the more as they enter the workforce and beyond.

College students have the greatest need, desire and aptitude for professional growth. Internships represent the early education of the professional world. They provide these emerging professionals with a head start they need to better attain career-long success.

The Internship Institute champions experiential education as an essential ingredient for college students to become workforce ready. It is the non-profit affiliate of Z University, which together aim to make internships a powerful remedy to close the gap between classroom learning and workplace competency.



#### About the Author

Matthew Zinman is the president and founder of The Internship Institute. He is driven by a passion to champion experiential education to improve workforce readiness.



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## Value Propositions

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| • Improve competencies                                    | • Add student productivity                                  | • Help students succeed                                     |
| • Career trial within or outside of chosen academic major | • Time gains enable employees to achieve higher level tasks | • Differentiate from other institutions to attract students |
| • Increase market value                                   | • Cultivate recruitment pipeline                            | • Strengthen employer relations                             |
| • Build professional network                              | • Inject enthusiasm & fresh ideas                           | • Broaden education role                                    |
| • Obtain mentoring guidance                               | • Build loyalty of future employees                         | • Value to offset rising tuition                            |
| • Earn credit and money*                                  | • Add/broaden capabilities                                  | • Create non-profit "safety net"                            |
| • Apply classroom learning                                | • Uphold social responsibilities                            | • Uphold social responsibilities                            |
| • Tap into "hidden" job market                            | • Prepare tomorrow's workforce                              | • Instill future alumni with loyalty                        |

\* The Internship Institute promotes the value of interns and advocates that employers should compensate them.

## Employer Host Sites

The gap between school and work is worsened by a general lack of understanding, appreciation, and sense of obligation among employers. We at The Internship Institute assert that any organization that can host interns, should; and that it's time for employers to put their action where their interests lie: to increase human capital in an ever-expanding "knowledge economy."

Any business that hires college graduates or simply needs added resources stands to benefit from having college interns and infusing their bottom line with student productivity. Based on this criterion, we contend that the vast majority of all businesses have the potential to be "site sponsors" regardless of size or function.

Businesses will find college students to be highly capable, highly motivated and, if well-managed, highly valuable. They can perform a variety of tasks, such as any involving research, writing, phone calls, event planning, and computer work.

The Internship Institute is working to encourage, educate, and enable employers and non-profit/charitable organizations to utilize interns and provide students with practical learning opportunities. We proudly developed our Intern Toolkit™ to give site sponsors everything they need to manage an internship program most easily and effectively to create real value for all involved. In the interest of full disclosure, it is proper to note that we are a for-profit company with a product to sell.

We are dedicated to champion the value of experiential education to improve workforce readiness, innovate related solutions beyond Intern Toolkit, and provide a number of free services and resources to fulfill this mission.

## Academic Trends in Experiential Education

A growing number of higher education institutions and academic departments within colleges require students to complete an internship or related program. Among the most noteworthy is Northeastern University, home of the Center for Experiential Education and Academic Advising (CEA). The College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) at Northeastern University [www.cea.neu.edu](http://www.cea.neu.edu) has maintained an Experiential Education Requirement for nearly 10 years.



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Internship graduation requirements have become the norm at many other academic departments at colleges and universities nationwide. However, the success of the program at Northeastern, evidenced in part by applications doubling and rising SAT scores of applicants, has recently led its Faculty Senate to approve a university-wide experiential learning graduation requirement. This internship mandate will take effect for first-year students in the fall of 2007.

Among the other colleges and universities with an experiential education mandate are: Drexel University, Georgia Tech, University of Cincinnati, California State University – Fullerton, West Virginia State University, Brigham Young University – Idaho, Rhodes College, and High Point University. Some institutions, like Widener University, Hendrix College, Holy Family University, Kettering University, and Keuka College, actively leverage their experiential education programs as a competitive advantage to attract applicants.

These and other related trends were highlighted by an esteemed panel of futurists in October 2006 at the annual meeting of the National Society for Experiential Education. The panelists, led by Michael True, Director of the Messiah College Internship Center, noted that:

- Internships are on the rise and may soon model the apprenticeships of yesteryear.
- The homogenization of higher education will compel more institutions to differentiate.
- The measure of academic success is shifting from classroom knowledge to student learning outcomes.
- Pressure will increase about internships and job placement from “involved parents” who’ll demand more tangible outcomes for the education they finance.
- The deepening complexities of the job market is widening the gap between school and work.
- The rising demand among employers for skilled labor places a higher value on experience.

This last point is also validated by the annual Experiential Education Survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers. The 2005 survey notes that 45% of employer respondents said “they offer higher salaries to incoming hires with intern/co-op experience than they offer those without such experience... On average, converting from an intern or co-op to full-time hire means adding 6.5 percent to the starting salary.” Naturally, college students who do internships can leverage that “foot in the door” to earn employment with site sponsors. These opportunities are known by too few as “the hidden job market.”

## Balancing Supply and Demand

It might look good on paper, but let’s address head-on the effect of creating an oversupply of students who need an internship to fulfill a graduate requirement. One obvious concern is that demand among employers, while now increasing, will still lag behind the increased supply of students. Internships are on the rise. According to an annual survey by Vault.com, 62% of college students completed an internship in the summer 2006. This figure is up 21% from the same survey in 2005.

At present, employers in some areas are barely keeping pace to accommodate students who seek internships. This concern may worsen when the economy takes its inevitable downturn. Of course, the rationale can be made that such times should increase motivation among employers to host student interns.

It is important to acknowledge the reality that an internship mandate neither can nor should prevent a college student from fulfilling their academic requirements to graduate. The great news is that there is a solution that also presents a tremendous opportunity, which is to infuse non-profit/charitable organizations with intern productivity. Just as employers need to be educated and empowered to put students to work, so can our community of non-profits, which — is easy to point out — are in dire need of added resources. The “Millennial” generation is also emerging with a high sense of altruism rooted in a history of volunteerism.



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In short, enabling non-profit organizations to create successful internship programs can provide a “safety net” to ensure that students fulfill an experiential education graduation requirement and also have the opportunity to make a meaningful difference.

The Internship Institute is taking action to help more non-profit organizations create internship opportunities and put students to work for communities and causes. Stay tuned for an important announcement about a related program roll-out in 2007.

## *The Time is Now*

Phasing-in an internship mandate will require a variety of initiatives to effectively support the needs of higher education institutions, college students, employers, and non-profit organizations alike. The recommendations below are presented for the purpose of adding to the dialogue and actions we hope this Position Brief will help to stimulate. It will take collaboration, commitment, and collective effort to affect and create substantive change.

- National experiential education organizations must help higher education institutions to further formalize academic and structural standards for internships, co-ops and related programs. This roadmap already exists and can be refined for broad adoption.
- University presidents, deans, provosts and other academic leaders must lead and act now.
- The experiential education and workforce development communities must forge a stronger cooperative to mount a business education campaign about the value of interns and help employers further develop the tools to improve the quality of programs. ZU is doing its part.
- Academic institutions must invest greater resources to academic departments who support internships and career services in order to adequately compensate for the increased workload involved to establish collaborative initiatives with employer host sites and to facilitate student placement. Many career services departments are grossly under-resourced.
- More employers must assume responsibility and take action by developing the infrastructure to create successful internship programs, put students to work, and provide practical training.
- The rising demand among employers for skilled labor places a higher value on experience.
- Government leaders, economic development, and related entities must step up to the plate to do their part to subsidize workforce readiness initiatives and reward employers, such as with tax incentives. This would be even more feasible if states eliminated all requirements of site sponsors to pay unemployment compensation taxes. The students can not collect unemployment, so it is unfair to penalize employers as well as senseless to sustain this deterrent for having interns.
- Foundations and philanthropic leaders should provide resources to create a “service learning internship safety net” and establish scholarship funds to help compensate unpaid interns.

## *Keep Talking and Walking*

In an effort to bring this Position Brief to life and fruition, we at The Internship Institute call on all parties to explore, educate and collaborate in every way possible. For our part, we are working to create a series of online discussion boards for students, employers, non-profits, and academic colleagues alike.

## *In Summary*

Identifying the problem is always much easier than creating the solution. Perhaps the most manageable way to convert ideas into action is to bear in mind that “the journey of 1,000 miles always begins with one step” (Confucius). Implementing an internship mandate will require more exploration and action to draw an effective roadmap to guide progress. A growing number of institutions, organizations, and leaders are blazing trails. We call on all of the aforementioned parties to follow, lead, and collectively move in the right direction.