

What's A Grad To Do?

A good internship or two will make you more attractive to employers especially in a recession

News of major layoffs and cutbacks are dominating headlines but there are several key strategies that can help soon to be college graduates land a job in an economic downturn. Many college students have turned to Internship programs to help boost their resume's appeal in hopes of landing a good job out of college.

My name is Travis Proctor and I will be faced with the same dilemma as many other college students come early summer finding a job. I am an advertising major at The University of Houston and I have gained a great deal of academic knowledge in the classroom, but I have found the most valuable lessons throughout my college experience have been through the internships I have done. By my graduation in May of 2009, I will have completed two internship programs that have both increased my knowledge of the professional field as well as improved my appeal to potential employers. Here are some tips will help you find an internship and make the best of your experience.

Professional Organizations: Network to meet your future employer

Finding a valuable internship can be very tough, especially in today's economy when many companies are cutting back in every way possible. Knowing where to look can help make this task much easier for students. There are many professional organizations located in Houston that help place students in internship programs and will even help fund them. The Business Marketing Association (BMA) of Houston (www.bmahouston.com) played a major role in helping me find both internships that I have done. The BMA awards local students with paid year-round and summer internships by funding half of the intern's salary with agreement from the employer to match the other half.

“Over the past 14 years the Houston chapter of the Business Marketing Association has awarded over \$75,000 in student assistance programs and dozens of students find work in our industry” Vic Cherubini-BMA Student Assistance Program

There are many other professional organizations in Houston that offer student internship programs. The American Advertising Federation (AAF) offers a summer internship programs which places students with companies looking for interns and also compiles a list of companies for students. Other local professional organizations include The American Marketing Association (AMA) and

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). Students should look for the local chapters of the organizations that serve their specific industry.

It is important to attend their meetings and events because the people who you'll meet are the individuals that work in your industry and could provide helpful guidance. You may even meet future coworkers or even your future boss. If you show initiative in a professional organization, the organization will work harder to help find you an internship. Internships are hard to find in a down economy so look at these networking opportunities as a way to meet new contacts.

Experience: The key to getting your first job

Experience is the most important aspect of a resume when you go to apply for jobs out of school. People always say, "You can't find a job because you don't have experience, but you can't find experience because you don't have a job". You won't get stuck in this bind if you find a good internship program. Employers will be more reluctant to hire a student intern with no experience than a graduate with no experience. Take advantage of your college years and gain as much experience as you can because it will pay off big.

The first internship that I complete was with Baker Oil Tools and gained a great deal of knowledge of how the oil and gas industry works. I interned in the Marketing Department and learned how advertisements and technical articles are placed into industry trade magazines and how trade show materials are generated. In the spring of 2009 after completing my internship at Baker Oil Tools, I was fortunate enough to land another internship through the BMA. My second internship was with the epic software group, inc. located in The Woodlands. The epic software group is a production company that specializes in 2D/3D animation, multimedia, web development and commercial photography. Some of the important skills that I learned while interning at epic included; new business development, client presentations and client relations.

Between the two internships that I did throughout my college career I was able to gain skills that will help me in the professional world as well as boost my resume for future employers. Along with the skills that I have learned at my internships, internship programs like I have completed also give students priceless networking opportunities.

Get Involved: Utilize what you have learned

Internships give you the opportunity to test what you have learned in the classroom in the professional world. Before interning at epic, I had never stood in front of a group of clients and

given a presentation about the capabilities of my company. I was very nervous my first time giving a presentation to clients but after capitalizing on opportunities at my internship, I have grown my public speaking skill set tremendously and this will go a long way in future jobs. Speaking in front of a group of clients is not the same as speaking in front of a class. I also attended trade shows and professional social events to gain a better understanding of business communication and client development that will serve as a valuable skill set. Familiarizing yourself with how the professional world works will pay tremendous dividends when you step foot in your first job out of college.

Appreciation: They helped you now you help them

After completing an internship program, don't forget the people who helped you. After you will have successfully completed an internship program and increased your social network and made your resume more appealing but you're not done. Weather you found an internship on your own or you found one through an organization, someone has helped you build your professional skills and given you priceless experiences and they deserve more than a "thank you". If a professional organization helped you find an internship, you can show your appreciation with donating your time by volunteering at their events or becoming a new member.

Completing successful internship programs during your college years will make you more appealing when looking for that first job out of school. There are many local professional business organizations that will help place students in internship programs and some will even help fund these opportunities. With the economy in a major recession and job opportunities becoming more scares, internship programs are the best way for college students to gain an advantage over the competition.



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