



## SOLUTIONS AT WORK

# Stony Brook provides real value for on-campus interns

**A conversation with Marianna Savoca, director of the Stony Brook Career Center.**

**T**HE DESIRE AMONG TODAY'S UNDERGRADUATES for career-related work experience is increasing exponentially. Their expectations that academic institutions provide learning beyond the classroom are also increasing.

**BY MATTHEW ZINMAN**

Imagine if every college and university put students to work in every campus office. Combining the greatest natural campus resource—students—with their increasingly important educational need—work experience—may sound a bit Utopian. That's the point exactly.

### **Experience matters**

A new employer poll about college graduate readiness was reported in January 2008 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU). The survey asked executives of 300 companies: "How Should Colleges Assess and Improve Student Learning?"

Far and away, the number one employer request is more campus involvement in programs where students apply college learning in a real world setting through internships and/or community service.

It's likely the campus response to this call will involve viewing campus career centers as worthy of greater investment, rather than as a necessary expense. In fact, career readiness and job placement may need to align with academic affairs rather than student services.



Resource allocation and reorganization aside, here's an immediate response. Have faculty members and administrators roll up their sleeves and create on-campus internships. It's not a budget-buster, and it can pay dividends.

### **Stony Brook's internship success**

At Stony Brook University (SUNY) the Career Center has become an employer of choice among students. In formalizing on-campus internships, they piloted an initial program with the best chance for success. That success inspired others to "buy-in" and emulate.

"Academic institutions can do more than promote experiential learning; they can provide it," says Marianna Savoca, director of the Stony Brook Career Center. "An organizational chart and the administrative functions of a university aren't all that different from other employer organizations. We have accounting, marketing, HR, finance, development, environmental health and safety—all of which provide opportunities for students to do productive work and gain real experience right here on campus."

The Stony Brook Career Center internship program is now in its fourth year.

"Once committed, we moved at full speed to make it work," explains Elena Polenova, Associate Director of Career Counseling. "We did an assessment of office needs in our own department, and everything else flowed from there."

Four job functions well-suited to students were identified:

- Peer career advising
- Intern and employer recruitment
- Communications and marketing
- Tech support

Intern recruitment and selection processes are identical with corporate hiring practices. Candidates submit a résumé and cover letter through Stony Brook's job listing database. They are expected to be prepared for formal

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ambitious students. Of course, a credit-related compensation structure reduces the operating cost of the internship program.

### **Training and management**

Building internships around academic credit also deepens the commitment of career center staff to provide a meaningful experience. Meanwhile, interns are only as productive as they are trained and managed. All interns receive job training, which includes a two-day pre-semester orientation and weekly two-hour professional development meetings.

Interns complete weekly reflection journals, have individual bi-weekly meetings with a supervisor and meet with a faculty advisor at least once per term.

The career center continually develops relationships with faculty sponsors, who are recruited to provide academic oversight for groups of interns.

A psychology professor is the faculty sponsor for interns who are peer career advisors. Business college professors provide academic oversight for marketing and human resources interns. Computer science professors support graphic designers. Professors of English and media studies serve as sponsors for the communications team.

"Faculty gain a valuable experience that produces an improved understanding and appreciation of career development," Savoca explains. "They see firsthand how their students are applying classroom concepts to real situations. Many have become enthusiastic supporters of our programs and services."

Campus administrators share their expertise as well. Some of them who

interviews, dressed professionally.

Students must be in good academic standing to receive academic credit for the experience. This shift from paid workers to internship-for-credit was less about saving wages and more about attracting

confer with interns are Stony Brook's director of marketing & licensing, director of human resources, director of affirmative action and director of academic advising.

### **Real work produces real results**

Work assignments with challenges are desirable. Cross-functional teamwork is fostered. Professional association memberships are encouraged, and dues are paid by the career center. Networking with others in their areas of interest is encouraged.

Kevin Nixon, a former Stony Brook career services office intern explains, "From my contacts with employers I was able to understand a job interviewer's mindset. From my contacts with students I was able to stay aware of the strategies, strengths, weaknesses and fears of job-seekers. I gained valuable firsthand knowledge of the complexities of seeking employment. The experience prepared me well."

It's not all work and no play. Interns participate in student appreciation lunches. They receive tickets to athletic events and performances. They are encouraged to participate in a variety of campus activities.

Stony Brook's Career Center interns perform more than 6,000 hours of worthwhile work during an academic year as they gain a hiring advantage and obvious employability.

Savoca says, "We're thrilled with the program's success and can document the success of our former interns out in the workplace. But it isn't just about the Career Center—this is a complete shift in thinking about how we can develop our students outside the classroom. I know this concept is catching fire at Stony Brook, and I know that we'll see dramatically different campus internship landscape in another year or two." ■



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