

Sign of the times: Lots of unpaid internships — but they're worth it

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), employers intend to hire fewer interns this year. Internship hiring will be cut by nearly 21 percent this year and co-op hiring by 11 percent, reported NACE's 2009 Experiential Education Survey.

While paid internships may be harder to find, unpaid internships have increased dramatically, said Dr. Neal Isaac, associate vice chancellor of Student Services at Keiser University's Port St. Lucie Campus.

Isaac said more employers are logging onto Keiser's online career center to post open internships. As a result, the number of internship opportunities from employers being offered to Keiser students has doubled since January.

"Some I've never seen before," he said. "We have teller interns at banks. I've never heard of teller internships before."

"We have a lot of Web site design internships," he added, as well as an apprenticeship with a Web developer. Employers are posting internships for financial analysts, technical writers and numerous other positions.

Paid or unpaid, internships offer valuable on-the-job training and experience, he added.

Isaac said he always tells students that, in a challenging economy, if they take the initiative and work an internship, they'll be getting valuable experience.

And when things pick back up, he said, students who

have gotten experience as interns have the greatest chance of being rewarded. Employers hire people with experience.

And in past studies, NACE found that more than half of employers offered their interns full-time jobs at the end of the internship.

"In my life, I have served in internships and it really paid off for me," said Isaac.

Isaac shared some tips the Student Services staff gives to students.

While paid internships may be harder to find, unpaid internships have increased dramatically.

Make yourself someone the employer would want to hire if they had a job opening. Employers want people who have good soft skills, he said.

Unlike technical skills needed for a specific job, soft skills apply to almost all jobs. They include showing up on time, good oral and written communication skills, the ability to work well with others, being open-minded and professional dress.

Keiser students are required to wear professional dress from day one of their education, Isaac said. Knowing how to dress professionally wraps the package for the employer. But it also helps students visualize themselves in the role of a professional employee.

Your internship must be a good resume-builder.

"We monitor them and make sure they're valuable experiences and that they relate to our students' academic course work," Isaac said.

If you are interested in serving an internship, check first with you academic adviser at school. He or she has insights to share, can tell you which internships fit with your field of study, and may know of an internship or similar opportunity that is available. Then go to your school's career center. They may have additional internship listings and will help you prepare to apply.

"We work with our students, including doing mock interviews," Isaac said.

For a list of paid government and non-government internships, look online at www.studentjobs.gov/e-scholar.asp. They even have placement for a college business graduate with the NASA Contracting Intern Program at the site.

If you haven't heard of an internship you want, go find one. Talk to employers in the industry you are studying. And be sure to talk with your school for help ensuring it will provide an educational experience. Some schools give college credit and additional guidance during your internship.

And here is a tip for employers. An employer may not hire an unpaid intern to fill the job of a person who was laid off, said Helen Scott, an employment attorney who represents employers for the Vero Beach law firm of Rosway Moore & Taylor.

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