The Global Marketplace and Internships Abroad

For quite some time, education abroad has been seen as a valuable résumé enhancer for students entering an increasingly global marketplace. But international educators know that one of the challenges for students in making that item on the résumé truly meaningful is being able to articulate exactly how education abroad has really prepared them to function effectively in a global business environment.

One of the answers to this challenge may be in the nature of the experience itself.

“Students today understand the value of a work abroad experience to leverage themselves in the global marketplace” says Beth Miller, senior internship coordinator at Weissman Center for International Business at Baruch College of the City University of New York (CUNY). “An international internship allows students to learn about a different culture, including the business culture, and gain a general understanding of global markets. This allows them to become more competitive candidates for companies, which today have more of a global footprint.”

According to Tony Johnson, president of the Academic Internship Council (AIC), employers, “particularly in times of austerity” are seeking people who have risen to challenges that make them stand out. “An international internship provides a chance for students to develop both personally and professionally—to be independent, and to discover the world of work at different levels and in different cultures. Experiential education has become—quite rightly in my opinion—an almost compulsory part of the academic experience,” Johnson says.

And though the numbers are hard to pin down, partly because many internships abroad are not-for-
I’m 6,700 miles away but just a conversation away from applying.

Get to know more than a million high school students like me, without spending a cent on travel.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

(800) 828-8222
colleges@collegeweeklive.com
collegeweeklive.com/NAFSA
Meeting the Challenges of Internships Abroad

“One major challenge is placing monolingual students,” says Kristina Holubova, senior program director of internships abroad at Cultural Vistas, a nonprofit organization dedicated to facilitating connections between U.S. students and international visitors through international exchange. “Technical and science students are easier to place in English-only professional positions, but placements in the humanities and liberal arts often require at least basic skills in another language. Foreign language acquisition is of utmost importance, and we believe should be further encouraged in higher education.”

Another major obstacle can be funding. At Baruch, a public institution, “for many students the biggest challenge is the financial commitment,” says Miller. “Between the airfare, program fees, and so on, internships can cost anywhere from $1,500 to $8,000.” Nevertheless, about 30 Baruch students participate in internships abroad each summer. The students do not receive credit for their internships, but all international interns at Baruch are provided with a scholarship that covers their airfare, an initiative made possible by the support of a foundation.

According to Katja Kurz, university
We set the pace

Passion and excellence at City University of Hong Kong

CityU's innovative professional education primes students for success in today's rapidly changing world. Our research output creates new knowledge that boosts social and economic development globally. We consistently rank among the top universities in the world.

It's a winning combination.

Visit us at NAFSA booth 1844

www.cityu.edu.hk
relations coordinator at Cultural Vistas, “Efforts are being made to increase international mobility for students traditionally underrepresented in international exchange, for example STEM majors, Pell grant recipients, and minority and nontraditional students. We have recently launched several programs reflecting this trend, such as a fellowship specifically targeting STEM majors and students from underserved communities for professional experience abroad, and a joint project with the Halle Foundation for career perspectives in the STEM fields for students from historically black colleges and universities.”

Not surprisingly, financial support helps grow the numbers. Governmental initiatives and public-private partnerships can help make internships abroad a viable prospect for students, and sometimes even a requirement.

“In Europe the trend [an escalation in international internships] started about 20 years ago, but it has definitely increased in the last seven years, in the context of the Erasmus program, in which internships abroad within the EU are supported financially by a grant,” says Gabriele Abermann, coordinator of English and intercultural communication, information technology, and systems management at Salzburg University of Applied Sciences. She adds, “In the Austrian universities of applied sciences sector, internships are a compulsory component in all bachelor programs, and an optional one in quite a number of master’s programs.” And in government-supported initiatives in the United as well as elsewhere, internships are increasingly being seen as a central component in education abroad experiences.

### Best Practices for Internships Abroad

#### Have clear objectives and sufficient resources

“Institutions need to commit time, resources, and research to the endeavor. Work abroad cannot be done with a ‘cookie cutter’ approach; each student wants and needs different things from an international work experience. Institutions need to know the immigration and legal ramifications of any international travel for a student.”

Beth Miller, senior internship coordinator, Weissman Center for International Business, Baruch College, CUNY

#### Prepare students for intercultural challenges

“Intercultural awareness is necessary for an overseas internship. Students need to be made aware of many factors, more than just ‘The food is different,’ and ‘They use words I don’t understand.’”

Valerie Hoogstad, former director of international education at Australia Catholic University and current lecturer at Sydney University

#### Be sure that internship abroad opportunities are supported by and in compliance with your institution’s policies for health, safety, and risk management.

“The typical campus divide between academic affairs and student services must be transcended in order to encourage and support both curricular and not-for-credit internships. The same kinds of support provided for health and safety in study abroad (health insurance, travel registry, predeparture orientation, etc.) must also be provided for internships abroad. Ideally, support should also be provided for the learning itself through opportunities for structured reflection.”

William Notting, director of education abroad, University of Michigan

#### Make sure to follow up in terms of integrating internships into the curriculum, and provide guidance for students in how to use their experience abroad in their career development.

“I believe more attention needs to be given by institutions to students who are returning from these fantastic experiences. The job is not over when a student gets on the flight home. Students need help in channeling this new knowledge, wisdom, and experience into a meaningful tool that will help them both academically, and in their search for a career.”

Tony Johnson, president, Academic Internship Council

Opinion is mixed on the pros and cons of using third-party providers for internships abroad. Johnson has set up programs in 11 different cities around the world. “I strongly believe that institutions are much better served by appointing a third-party provider who already has an infrastructure in the city of interest,” he says. “These providers should have local staff on hand to deal with all the preparation and, once started, the managing of internship programs. Local knowledge is everything. Students should have strong preparation and orientation, as well as counseling available to them before and during the placement. This can only be done properly by
on-site professionals who are an integral part of the local working community. It cannot be done effectively from a thousand miles away by faculty members or administrators who have too much to do already."

Jeff Whitehead, director of the University Center for International Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, agrees. "I recommend working with established partners," he says. "We work with an organization [who helps us] manage much of the logistical work. They help arrange items such as housing, paperwork, and even some placements, in places where we are unable to leverage our own contacts."

Others recommend a hybrid approach. "The institution needs to establish first exactly what the objective of their program is, and how many resources can be set aside for establishing it," says Abermann. "Building [institutional] relationships to companies will eventually be better, as these connections may be useful also for other potential collaborations; but this takes time, so a combination approach might be a good start."

And according to Miller, "It really depends on what the institution’s students are demanding. We continue to grow and learn about the area of work abroad based upon our interactions with students and their areas of interest. It requires dedicated resources, which can be a problem for some institutions. Since it is so resource-driven, an institution really has to do both in terms of direct placement opportunities, and working with third parties."

**Emerging Developments in Internships Abroad**

A recently established annual Global Internship Conference http://globalinternshipconference.org/ offers educators the opportunity to discuss together the challenges and current issues of international internships, as well as best practices and emerging trends.

When asked what some of the new and exciting developments in internships abroad are, Johnson says, "There is a growing demand for internships in the less traditional academic areas. For example, my son has just completed a six-week placement on an eco-farm on the West Bank in the Palestinian territories. And a program I am working on right now with the University of California, Berkeley, and St. Xavier’s College in Mumbai, is offering internships with an emphasis on global poverty. Students will work on issues such as healthcare, homelessness, and the environment in surroundings where their efforts, now and in the future, will make a huge difference."

He adds, "Over the years at the AIC and its predecessor organizations, we have seen more than 20,000 young people immersing themselves into a work environment and culture that is not their own. That in itself has to be good news for everybody."