

FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND SPANISH

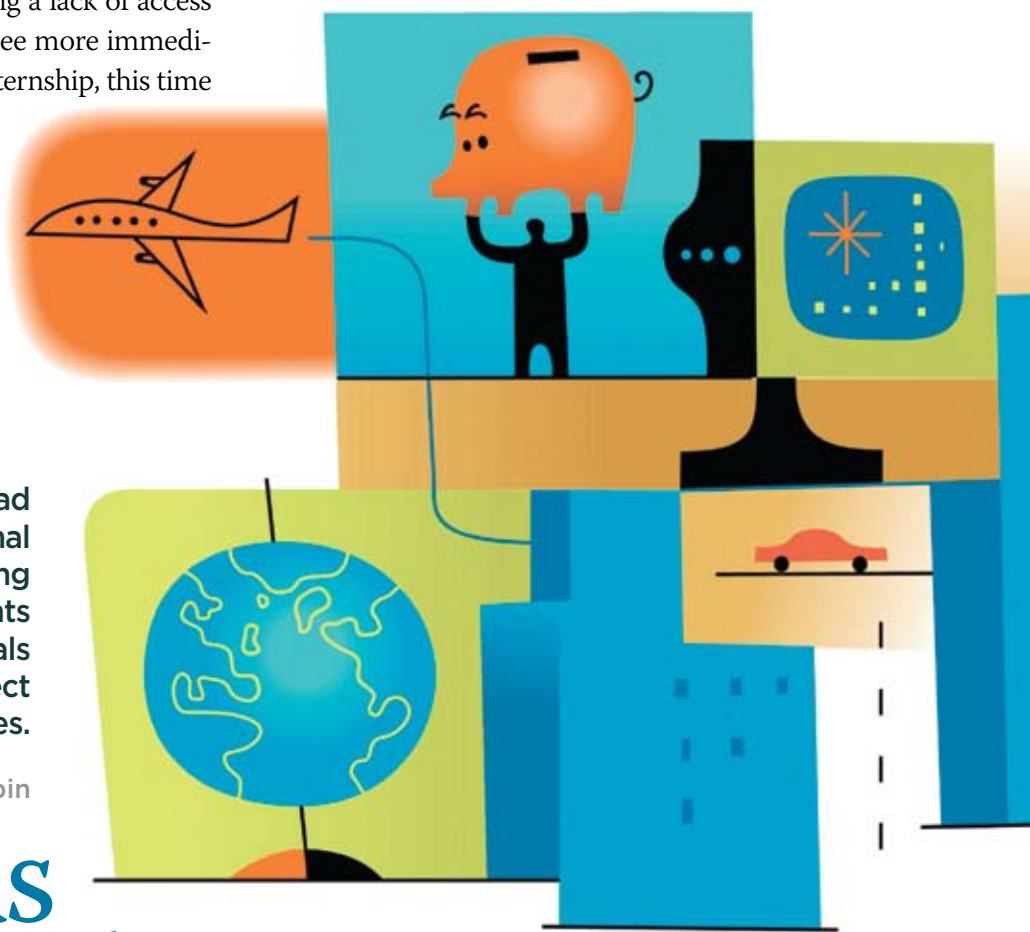
major Kathryn Fowler, interning for a summer in the marketing department of an engineering firm in Valencia, Spain, was “the most significant thing” she could do for her future job prospects. “It was almost more important than my grades,” says the Florida State University senior. “While a 3.5 GPA is good enough for most companies, what they really want is experience.” Rachel Smith, a University of Oregon international development major, learned from her stint at a community development nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Senegal that she wanted to switch fields. Witnessing a lack of access to basic medicine, and impatient to “see more immediate effects,” she completed a second internship, this time working in clinics in India. Her second experience confirmed that she found medicine more satisfying than development. She has abandoned her original graduate school plans and is now applying for a joint degree in medicine and global health policy.

Whether to bolster a résumé determine a career path, or both, more college students are becoming aware of the benefits of interning abroad. If experience is all they needed to brighten their résumés, young U.S. students could get it by interning at home, as many do. What college students are learning is that more employers are also expecting them to demonstrate a global perspective. An overseas internship kills two birds with one stone by providing real-life work experience and time imbedded in a foreign country. Whether interviewing African villagers to assess the efficacy of a local NGO's efforts, or translating documents in a corporate office in a European city, student interns receive concentrated exposure to a local culture that can result in powerful personal growth.

Call them “study abroad squared”—international internships are drawing growing numbers of students seeking to shore up credentials while securing a more direct entry into other cultures.

By Kyna Rubin

Overseas Internships Jumpstart



An international internship can offer a quick, deep route into another society. Working abroad demands a lot from individuals. It requires that students develop independence, self-assurance, and flexibility—all attributes that employers highly value. From such internships, students are bringing home real skills they didn't have before, and "more confidence in their sense of themselves as adults," observes Laura Bayne, of the University of Texas-Austin education abroad office. Working overseas while in college may not land every student a job, but it plays a large role in getting

them into the door for an interview, adds Erin Brown, internship coordinator at Florida State University. But strengthening a résumé is not the sole motivator for interning abroad. Majors like business, education, and social work often mandate work experience before graduation. Within the Oregon University System, for instance, social work and family and human services departments have well-developed domestic internship requirements; these can now be fulfilled through international placements, says Christopher Bennett of that system's IE3 Global Internships program.

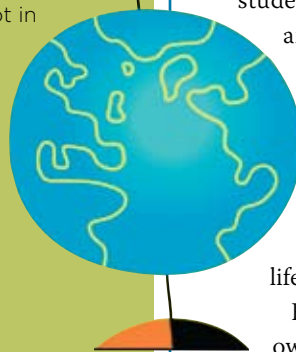


Overseas Internships Jumpstart Careers

Advice on Creating and Running Overseas Internship Programs

These rules of thumb come from international internship coordinators at nine U.S. institutions:

- Examine your goals—what does your student population want? Students will not show interest in overseas internships that are too expensive and/or don't meet their specific needs.
- Figure out where such a program best fits into your institution's administrative structure—within education abroad, career services, or elsewhere?
- Put resources behind the program to make it successful because costs can be high, especially if your institution chooses to place interns itself. Economies of scale do not apply to operating internships as they do to education abroad, because students intern individually, not in groups.
- Consider hiring someone exclusively devoted to managing overseas internships.
- Get buy-in from individual departments because without it students won't be able to earn meaningful credits for their internships, and from career services staff, who might feel their turf has been treaded upon.
- Interview employers or providers; be selective in what you provide students.
- If using outside providers, start with a few organizations and grow from there.
- A good place to begin researching provider organizations is the International Volunteer Programs Association (www.volunteerinternational.org), a Tennessee-based group whose members adhere to principles and practices designed to ensure program quality.
- Maintain data on intern numbers, sites, student experiences, and returned interns—this information is useful to student participants and over time can potentially influence institutional policies.



faculty and alumni or their own education abroad networks to secure work placements for students around the world, while others steer them to third-party providers. Some do a combination of both. Yale University's Jane Edwards, associate dean of international affairs, has watched student interest in working abroad surge between 2003 and 2008. During that time, Yale's offerings grew from one program to 17, and internship placements from 30 to 250 students. Students increasingly view their education experience as being a 12-month rather than a nine-month phenomenon, she finds. Yale sends

students to work abroad for summers only, arranging its noncredit internships in 18 countries through alumni and faculty. Edwards finds "significant value-added" in setting up internships this way. "Going through people connected to the school is good for the work supervisor and the student; it generates life-long networks."

Florida State University also handles its own placements, piggybacking its overseas internships onto its education abroad infrastructure. FSU internship coordinators at its four long-time education abroad centers (in London, Panama City, Valencia, and Florence) place interns, who then live at center housing together with education abroad students. A quarter of FSU overseas interns are non-FSU students. In winter 2008 the university was in discussion to become an international internship provider for other institutions.

In contrast, UT-Austin relies on some of the dozens of outside providers now in the marketplace. The idea of UT students working abroad originated in the business school, which requires internships. Finding it difficult to secure overseas internships for which students could receive credit, the business school started to screen providers offering substantive programs for academic credit. The university and education abroad office then decided to open these international work opportunities to the whole school. St. Olaf College, a small school not staffed to create internships for students, also steers students to outside providers. According to Sandra Malecha, assistant director of internship programs, the school lists such organizations on its Web site, offers students a list of questions they should ask, helps students contact alumni in the country, and lists where students have interned before.

Foreign internships don't only benefit individual students. They also help institutions meet their goals of getting more enrollees engaged in education abroad. An overseas internship often piques the interest of students who are not necessarily keen on traditional education abroad. Other benefits to an institution: returned interns bring practical experience into the classroom, and overseas internships enhance the visibility of graduates and the university. "Being able to boast that we have such opportunities can raise the profile of a particular academic program," says UT-Austin's Laura Bayne.

Multiple Options

A burgeoning interest in overseas internships over the last five years or so has translated into a sharp spike in opportunities. Some U.S. institutions rely on

Why Counting Matters

Just how many college students are interning abroad? Nobody really knows. William Nolting, director of the University of Michigan's overseas opportunities office, estimates roughly 50,000 a year, 20 percent of whom receive academic credit. These figures are based on the Institute of International Education's *Open Doors Report on International Exchange*, on his own surveys of the major internship providers, and on a 2005 Brookings Institution survey of volunteer abroad programs.

Comprehensive data is hard to collect, given various institutions' methods to collect such data, if it is collected at all. "The *Open Doors* survey does not count non-credit education abroad because of the vast range of international experiences that can constitute education abroad without credit, and the difficulty that institutions face in tracking and counting students who participate in these types of activities," says Rajika Bhandari, director of research and evaluation at the Institute of International Education (IIE). "While IIE recognizes that the *Open Doors* survey is an undercount of all educational experiences abroad, it has the value of producing reliable data that can be tracked over time, documenting the steady increase in numbers of U.S. students who study abroad or do internships abroad, and receive academic credit for that overseas experience towards their degree back home."

Another difficulty in getting a handle on numbers is the decentralized nature of overseas internships. "Universities won't have a complete picture until they go directly to their academic and co-curricular departments," says Nolting, who notes that Michigan is one of only a few schools that attempt to track students who do noncredit work abroad. In 2006–2007, the school sent some 2,000 students to study abroad and just over half that number for overseas cocurricular education.

One catalyst for individual departments recently coming forward to report to Nolting's office on students they send abroad for noncredit activities points to the reason he argues that tracking these students matters in the first place—their numbers can have an impact on university policies. Starting in 2008, the university offered new travel abroad insurance coverage, part of the institution's first campus-wide group plan. Most policies only cover education abroad students receiving academic credit, he says. "We felt we could not exclude hundreds of students [those going for noncredit] from having access to health insurance abroad. So when we formulated the RFP for a new insurance provider, we specified that the policy had to be available to all students, going abroad for credit or not." The current policy is so.



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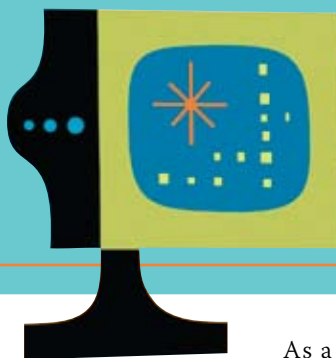
The Engineering Factor

Technology majors differ from their liberal arts classmates in that they are less inclined to study abroad because their curriculum is very tight, and overseas credits don't usually transfer into something they need. Like fellow social sciences and humanities students, however, engineering students are highly drawn to overseas internships, if for somewhat different reasons: host companies generally pay engineering and science interns at least the cost of living, and some engineering programs require internships before graduation. Thus, demand for overseas work stints can be high among technology students.

Take Georgia Tech, 60 percent of whose students are in engineering. In 2007-2008, 83 percent of Georgia Tech students who interned overseas were engineering or science majors. Total student numbers more than doubled from the previous year (from 46 to 115) because of an added staff position, says Debbie Gulick, hired in 2005 to create and head the school's first work abroad program, housed in the division of professional practice. If she could add a third person, her office could potentially double the numbers again, she says. In 10 years, she'd like to see a staff of five with regional responsibilities. That's not impossible: Georgia Tech's leaders highly value the program. Having students work abroad is part of a strategic plan to have half of all undergrads graduate with an international experience. Work abroad also

fits nicely into Georgia Tech's nearly century-old tradition of enabling students to engage in real-life work experience before graduation. Students intern abroad without academic credit from three to six months. The school keeps them enrolled during this period, which helps them get visas and "is a way for us to keep track of them," says Gulick. Those going for a semester sometimes need to delay graduation to earn required credits, but that's commonly done here so is no deterrent, she says. Georgia Tech pours considerable resources into its program. Evidence includes a 40-page *Georgia Tech Work Abroad Handbook*, with advice on how to get the most from an internship; a two-page *Work Abroad Employer Brochure* that lays out benefits to host firms; and assistance with visa and work permits. Her office relies heavily on faculty contacts to place students abroad. But by virtue of the institution's reputation and extensive overseas links, companies often search out Georgia Tech to fill their intern slots.

"Sometimes they've dealt with our students and faculty through some other program and want more ties with us," says Gulick. Participating employers include Continental AG, Intel Corporation, and Siemens.



Meeting Expectations

Identifying appropriate host organizations, sticking with them over time, and finding proper student-host matches are the biggest challenges for international internship managers. As part of its mission, for 13 years the Foundation for Sustainable Development has been training college students and others to work in the trenches of overseas community development. Arranging compatible matches requires time and "excellent field staff with great relationships on the ground and great language and psychological skills," says the group's now former director of communications, Alex Michel. If the one person in the host organization who speaks English leaves, the foundation has to cultivate relations with new individuals, or move on to a different organization. Flux can affect corporate as much as grassroots placements. Georgia Tech's internship abroad program (see box) is always looking for new placements because companies shut down, says Debbie Gulick, director of the school's work abroad program. During a global recession, they may discontinue their internships altogether.

As a consortium of 15 partner schools in Oregon and nearby states, the Oregon University System's IE3 Global Internships program has access to a large, instant network of people with ties to overseas organizations, so does not find it hard to identify host organizations. The greater challenge is setting up a host's expectations. "The concept of an internship doesn't always translate across cultures," finds Christopher Bennett. "It has to be full-time professional work for 10 weeks. We don't send students across an ocean to serve tea." Students have very high expectations about what they're going to accomplish. "In the developing world," says Holly Rivers of the University of Notre Dame, "they don't always know what to do with a 20-year-old from the United States who has the mentality that time is very important and you need to be very efficient and work hard. Over the years, that's been an enormous challenge." To help ensure substantive experiences for its students, Yale University makes expectations clear to potential host employers. Philip Jones, of the university's career services office, helps supervisors



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abroad draft job descriptions and sends applications directly to them. "They pick the students, we don't," says Edwards. Her office relies on people on the ground, including, for instance, Yale Alumni Club members in Buenos Aires, to sit down with the employer and explain student expectations.

Once on site, it's sometimes tricky for the student and supervisor to agree on what the student will be doing all day. Young people need direction. Not all employers excel at providing it. Managing domestic internships is easier, says Edwards; with international internships these situations can be harder to recalibrate. Yale's in-country staff deal with communication issues between students and supervisors. If students do encounter unhappy matches, their choices, says Edwards, are to make it work or call it a day. Most make it work. Yale, like other institutions profiled in this story, finds it rarely has to bring students home early. The few that have returned have done so because of health rather than workplace problems, says Edwards.

To avert intern unhappiness, it's a good idea to clarify students' assumptions up front. UT-Austin's Laura Bayne gauges students' expectations before they apply because some have unrealistic notions about the responsibility they'll be given or the name brand of the company to which they'll be assigned. "If they feel they can

work in the mergers and acquisitions department of a small firm, that it doesn't have to be a big, famous company, the student will have a more productive experience," she says. Students also need to understand what they're getting into. Some jobs entail rising at dawn to make a two-hour commute into an office where the work may sometimes be boring. "Our students aren't being asked to write a country's five-year plan," quips Jane Edwards, FSU student Kathryn Fowler felt she got "more of a true cultural experience" [than she would have from studying abroad] because of the opportunity to socialize with her coworkers, but found that "as an intern, I couldn't use my creativity." On the other hand, fellow FSU student Kyle Rausch, an international affairs major, expected to be fetching coffee and standing at a copy machine most days. His London internship for a member of Parliament did require him to learn how to prepare tea British-style, but on his first day in the office he was asked to draft a press release, a surprise that delighted (and frightened) him.

Not for Everyone

Despite greater interest in overseas internships, limiting factors keep the numbers down. Commuting nearly two hours to Parliament by subway and train, and trying to decipher by phone the Scottish accents



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of his boss's constituents, put strains on Kyle Rausch. He welcomed the support he got from sharing a flat at FSU's London center with education abroad students, and he was grateful for the help of FSU's on-site intern coordinator, who taught him how to take the Tube his first day of work and explained British office culture. "I can't imagine not having that structure there for my first internship," he says. But most students who intern overseas don't receive that level of daily, immediate support. The extra psychological and emotional demands put on them—together with language requirements in non-English-speaking countries—mean that fewer students engage in internships than in study abroad. Since 2005, for instance, UT-Austin's overseas interns have constituted a tenth of its education abroad population.

In seeking adaptable, confident, and mature students to intern overseas, institutions raise the bar by asking more than they do of education abroad applicants—a resume, a professional reference, and a higher GPA are often required. The Oregon University System's application process for overseas internships "is deliberately challenging," and in itself provides an element of professional development. Oregon's IE3 program (which stands for International Education, Employment, and Experience) requires candidates to

explain how an internship fits into their career goals, even if those goals are not yet clearly defined; it also asks candidates to write a cover letter to the prospective host organization. "If students can't complete our application, they won't be successful on our program," says Christopher Bennett. International internships aren't for everyone, cautions Oregon State University student Jack Newkirk, an international ecotourism major who spent six months working as a guide at a rain forest retreat in Australia. "People who do this should be motivated to do things on their own because often it's just you."

Paying Up

Another factor that can narrow student interest in overseas internships—especially during a recession—is cost. Interning abroad can be a hard sell to students without financial assistance or the ability to self-pay. Depending on the program and country, interning abroad can be as costly as studying abroad. Working in an unpaid position—usually only science and engineering interns get paid—arranged through a third-party provider can cost a student at a public institution more than a semester at home does. "I'm spending all this money to work?" students ask



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themselves. Kids who intern abroad have a similar socio-economic profile as those who study abroad, says Laura Bayne: the medium-income students often get squeezed out, while the neediest get aid and the wealthy can afford the fees. Most students won't be interested in an international internship unless they see there's a payoff down the road, she finds.

The Oregon University System's IE3 program has an agreement that the universities within its consortium will waive tuition charges for overseas internships. In lieu of home tuition, students pay an IE3 program fee, which Christopher Bennett says most of them find affordable. Program fees for, say, Latin American internships, which require more modest airfares than those in Africa, or internships that offer free housing, are cheaper than home campus tuition, he says. Fees remain reasonable, Bennett argues, because internships require less on-the-ground staffing than traditional education abroad programs do.

A Sampling of Internship Programs

Florida State University

For-credit internships require a work-based project, a weekly journal, a monthly presentation to center students about the job; sometimes the sponsoring professor requires a paper; the on-site center intern coordinator observes interns at the workplace and evaluates them; students complete an evaluation form of their site and their internship.

University of Notre Dame

Most internships are noncredit; returnees must write a three- to five-page paper to recruit other students; the school is trying to find outlets for returnees to pursue social justice-related questions prompted by the internship; currently a class called Cultural Difference-Social Change gives them time to share and write about their experiences.

St. Olaf College

For-credit internships are offered during the January term, summer, and semester. Students are required to have both a faculty and site supervisor, and to complete a six-page "academic internship learning agreement" that includes a college waiver (related to behavioral expectations), job description, and learning goals and strategies. Students abroad for a semester (and their supervisors) must fill out a mid-point and final evaluation. After return students discuss their experiences at an international internship reflections gathering. Recently, students who went abroad through Child Family Health International conducted a seminar for the biology department.

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But fee levels vary by country and level of on-site support. Responding to the interests of Oregon students, the IE3 program places more interns in community development NGOs in Africa and Latin America than in corporations in Europe. Once abroad, students receive support from their work supervisor and regular e-mail communication from the IE3 regional director; they also retain e-mail contact with the home faculty member who is granting them credit for the experience, says Bennett. In contrast, FSU interns go exclusively to its education abroad centers, all located in developed countries, whose costs are higher. An internship coordinator at each center places individual students based on their needs and interests, and meets with them weekly. Fees for FSU overseas internships are included in home tuition.

Some institutions are better equipped than others to subsidize students to intern abroad. The University of Notre Dame's Kellogg Institute for International Studies provides \$4,000 to \$6,000 to all students who intern abroad through private grants and funds and its own endowed institute budget. Yale, which offers institutional assistance to 44 percent of its undergraduates, provides financial aid for an international experience, which includes a summer-long overseas internship. A student who receives 80 percent of financial assistance from the university receives proportional coverage for the cost of the internship. Other schools allow students to apply federal aid or institutional education abroad scholarships to overseas internships.

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Measuring Success

Defining what makes an effective, meaningful overseas internship can be as subjective as determining successful education abroad. Some institutions are pleased if the student learned something important about themselves and their career paths. Universities that send interns to poor countries want students to be challenged by their experience. The University of Notre Dame, whose top internship destinations are Peru, Uganda, and Ghana, hopes students return asking questions. In looking for success, that school's Holly Rivers wants to see that students struggle a bit to absorb what they saw and, as a result of their discomfort, pursue a topic of study that addresses the on-the-ground realities to which they were exposed. Students who return "and just move on," she says, have had less successful internships, though she suspects that five or 10 years out, even these individuals may find that the experience affected them in some important way.

Institutions that provide credit for international internships, and even some that do not (summer internships are rarely credit-bearing) seek to assess these experiences in concrete ways by requiring on-site reports, papers, supervisor evaluations, or post-return student presentations. The type and rigor of these requirements vary by department and sponsoring faculty member (see sidebar for examples).

Improving Programs, Looking Ahead

Being relatively new to international internships, many schools are still tweaking their programs. St. Olaf College has been sup-



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A photograph of three young people, two men and one woman, smiling and posing against a white brick wall. The man on the left is wearing a green jacket over a red shirt. The woman in the middle is wearing a yellow sweater. The man on the right is wearing a black jacket over a grey shirt.

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porting students interning abroad for many years. Based in part on required student and supervisor evaluation forms, in 1999 internship managers started compiling statistics on these students including a list of host organizations, whether the experience was a good one for the student, what was lacking, and so on. This information has been the basis for recent faculty discussion groups, whose deliberations have resulted in program enhancements. To encourage students to better plan for their internship, the school has moved up the deadline for required paperwork, forcing students to be more thoughtful about their intentions for interning abroad. Also, the internship office has updated its waiver form to include the added risks involved with working overseas. The office now provides more information to faculty about what makes a meaningful internship experience, and requires that a faculty member supervising a student going to, say, a Guatemalan orphanage, have expertise related to that country or type of work.

Will all this fresh interest in overseas internships survive the current economic downturn?

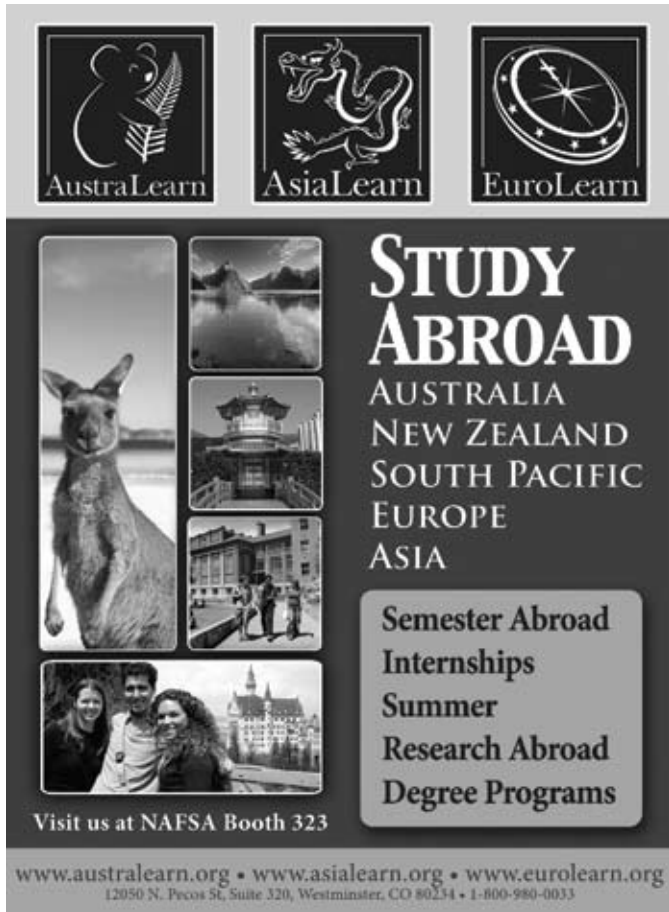
At time of writing, deadlines for many 2009 internship programs had not yet passed, so program coordinators could not say for sure. A few note that more students are heading to internships in Latin America because airfare costs are less than they are to Asia or Africa. (Latin America is also a popular option because U.S. college students are more likely to speak Spanish than other languages.) In January, New York City-based CDS International, a nonprofit exchange organization that provides internships abroad, was seeing a slight increase in applications for non-paying internships. This does not surprise CDS's Katerina Holubova. A sour U.S. economy spurs students to want "to get a leg up on the competition once they graduate," she says, and working abroad can help jumpstart a career before job hunting at home. Just under half of the German internships CDS offers to students are paid; these positions are generally in science, engineering, and business (nonprofit- or government-based liberal arts internships are rarely paid). Holubova says she has heard from some German companies that they have suspended their internship programs for the foreseeable future. She also expects that firms will be paying interns less than they did in the past, and that some will no longer offer pay at all.

She predicts, however, that the recent weakening of the Euro against the dollar will make it easier than it has been for students to swing even unpaid internships.

Only time will reveal the full impact of the current recession on student interest in overseas work or study. Once the downturn passes, bets are that more and more students will learn about the benefits of overseas work experience. Institutions should be prepared to steer them to the right opportunities.

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