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Internships will help you find your dream job

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Every time I applied for a job when I was in high school, the employer asked me about my work experience. Since I didn't have any, I was not considered as a prospective employee. So I asked one of my teachers from college preparatory school, "how do I get work experience when employers only hire people who already have experience?"

She recommended that I work for free until I had gathered enough experience to be hired for a paid job. Taking her advice turned out to be very beneficial. The year before I started college, I was hired as an editorial assistant for a fitness magazine. The salary was half of what I earned at a local retirement home. My parents tried to persuade me to continue working for the retirement

home because they didn't want me to waste my time working for almost nothing.

I followed my gut and moved across the country despite being told not to. My salary barely covered the rent, food and transportation. However, I do not regret my decision. After working with the fitness magazine for a year, I was hired as a reporter for a local magazine and earned \$150 per page. If I did not accept the position at the fitness magazine, I wouldn't be writing for the local magazine.

According to Fox Business, 42.3 percent of college seniors with an internship under their belt received at least one job offer after graduating compared to only 30.7 percent of seniors without internship experience.

Many students are worried about the money they will lose by completing an internship instead of having a paid job. According to Profes-

sor Ileana Costea, who teaches in the Department of Manufacturing Systems Engineering and Management, believes taking loans and doing internships is better than working small jobs through college. Costea said that internships are vital for gaining real work experience.

"Students who take internships advance faster toward a successful career and it can also make a student study harder because they have seen the importance of skills and knowledge," said Costea. "Students will also better understand what working in a certain field really entails."

She emphasized that loans should be avoided as much as possible, but acknowledged that there are times when this is not an option. With appropriate planning, a student should be able to pay back their loans after graduation.

Costea believes internships are important regardless of career field. She advises students to plan their

life for success by interning, speaking with professors and people in the profession, and attending professional meetings. This is a way to better understand the field and career opportunities within.

Interning is not only about having something to put on your resume. It also enables you to test-drive a career, with the chance to network with professionals in your field and establish relationships with mentors. Internships allow students to gain a real world perspective on an occupation, get an introduction to the field's culture and accumulate new skills.

In 2010 the Economic Policy Institute found that internships were replacing entry-level jobs. Interns are being used less frequently for coffee runs and fetching lunch; they are now given more career-related responsibilities and assignments they would not have received otherwise.

Those students worried about their finances should consider applying for a paid internship. Paid internships give students more responsibility and greater chances of getting a job after completion. However, to be hired as a paid intern the student needs experience, which they might need to get by doing unpaid internships.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers conducted a survey of 20,000 graduating seniors last year. It concluded that paid internships are more likely to lead to a job offer and higher starting salaries than an unpaid one, according to the New York Times.

I am about to start my fourth internship at a Los Angeles-based magazine, fact-checking and writing content. I believe that I would not have been accepted for the position if I had chosen to do part-time jobs unrelated to my career field.