

A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

Workforce Thought Leadership by the Columbus Chamber



KEY POINTS:

*Sharing Intern Perspectives
Creating Shared Expectations
Prioritizing Health & Safety
Successfully Transitioning to Virtual*

A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

Article by Kelly Fuller, Workforce Director

With over 15 years working in career and technical education in both high school and adult settings, I can share that really good internship experiences are both student focused and relevant to the business. Working with local educational providers, companies can collaboratively build a strong system. There is no question that a well-designed and properly executed internship program can lead to a robust and skilled pipeline of emerging talent for your business. In reality, any size company can utilize relationships with higher education to not only provide upperclassmen with real work experience, but to also grow their own next generation of employees. Students want that hands-on experience and employers are eager to share the benefits of joining their company.

Continue reading... 

The result of offering paid and meaningful learning opportunities to potential employees is well documented:

A 2018 study of over 200,000 students and 500 colleges and universities, conducted by Intern Bridge, found that 65% of college graduates receiving job offers upon graduation had a paid internship with a business in their field of study; while those with no internship experience fared worse, with only 35% receiving offers in their field of study.

Fewer graduates were able to begin their careers and many companies who were seeking workers missed out on their intellectual capital.



In the months before March 2020, unemployment rates across the nation and Columbus region were at historic lows, and most industry sectors were competing for talent.

Those companies with strong and well-known internship programs had a definitive advantage over those without.

65%

receiving job offers
had internship
experience



35%

receiving job offers
had **no** internship
experience



FROM THE INTERN'S PERSPECTIVE

How to set your internship program apart

What is most important to the student learner when searching for a quality internship? Interns with multiple offers evaluate their choices based on 3 main factors. It is important to note that these factors have not changed with the onset of the pandemic. Let's take a look at how these student-driven choices can help businesses as well.

1. Opportunity to get a true "hands on" work experience.

This benefits the business by bringing an eager and developing potential hire to the workplace that is hungry to obtain substantive experience. With a different generational view, the business can gain insight and a new perspective on products, services and overall workplace practice.

2. Structure and mentoring.

Offering a well-structured internship program with hands-on training, real experience, and mentoring opportunities can increase your brand awareness and recognition among jobseekers significantly. A successful intern/hire can be your best recruiter for talent growth in the future. By identifying the leaders and mentors in your organization, the business is simultaneously investing in their incumbent workforce, helping them grow their skills, as well.

3. Commitment to social justice.

An internship can be your companies' opportunity to be the ambassador for your product or service, setting the standard for the intern/employee. Businesses with well-articulated values, enhanced by their impact on the community, are employers of choice. Businesses can and should find ways to engage with initiatives that align with their values, such as Chamber-supported [Ohio Business Competes](#) and the [Columbus Women's Commission](#).

"Intentionality does not equal impact. When it comes diversifying a firm's workplace too often people buckle down on the idea of "intention." Intention is never good enough. The extra step of action is required. When strategizing how to bring in more diverse talent you have think, "What is the impact on diversifying our workplace for both the candidates and the firm?" We know that diversity of thought and ethnic backgrounds leads to higher performance at large, but is your company's culture ready to bring in diverse candidates?

I chose JP Morgan for my internship experience mostly because of its bold diversity and inclusion initiatives. My first internship experience was with the [Advancing Black Pathways Apprenticeship Program](#), which ultimately led to me taking an additional two different positions after my initial experience."

- Tyreece Harris,
JP Morgan Chase intern





COLUMBUS CHAMBER TAKING THE LEAD

The Columbus Chamber has been actively involved with offering internships for many years, successfully providing real world/real work opportunities for student learners. One example of intern turned full-time employee is the Chamber's Marketing Manager, Courtney West, who began her career with The Chamber immediately after graduating from Butler University. I recently sat down with Courtney to learn more about her experience as an intern.

Why did you choose The Columbus Chamber for your internship experience?

"Throughout the interview process with the Columbus Chamber, it was clear that I would have the opportunity to work with a myriad of our Central Ohio businesses as a marketing intern, as well as learn a comprehensive set of skills from working with the Chamber's management team. I knew from my interview that there was tangible potential for my professional development, so I was eager to accept the role with the Chamber."

What were the major factors in choosing where and what type of internship experience was best for you?

"I was looking for an internship that would welcome me as an immediate contributor within the organization, and the internship with the Chamber was positioned perfectly to do just that. Internship experiences should aim to closely mimic some of the experiences of a full-time position, so I wanted to have numerous opportunities to collaborate with other leaders within the organization. Looking back now, I believe this approach allowed me to create great working relationships with my future coworkers and helped show Chamber leadership that I was a good fit within our company culture."

What would you share with employers who are trying to build a more robust and inclusive internship program?

"Be sure to invest time and resources into planning your internship program, but also be flexible when it comes to your intern's specific interests. Being able to shift tasks when appropriate to accommodate those interests will create a more beneficial experience for your intern, and in return, better invest in our workforce. It is important for businesses to understand the value of an internship as a 'prolonged interview' to identify potential full time permanent talent. Whether you lead a small business or a not for profit organization, interns can bring value and add to your overall productivity."

DESIGNED FOR SUCCESS

The best designed intern experiences are intended to make an impact on the learner and to enrich the hosting business. Even if you are bringing on one student intern, consider the following as a guide to shared expectations as you are building your program:

- *The student should be directly learning from a professional in his/her intended career field -*
- *The intern has a mentor who provides quality training, supervision and evaluation. -*
- *The student should receive regular mentoring through weekly in-person meetings or video conferencing. -*
- *The internship site provides educationally enriching projects tied to learning objectives. -*

REIMAGINING THE WORK

With devastation brought on by the pandemic, internship programs as recruiting tools were one of the first staffing casualties. Suddenly, delivering a quality experience for the learner and business was in jeopardy. Internship hiring fell by over 62% within companies across most industry sectors throughout the U.S. from March to July. Some business leaders struggled with keeping on pace of hiring, while some sectors were not as impacted by the shift in hiring needs. While the hospitality and restaurant sectors took a great hit, others like supply chain, healthcare and banking continued to look for ways to source new talent through internships. In one-on-one workforce consultations with Chamber members, inquiries relating to “connecting to interns” have significantly increased, surfacing as a Top 3 Issue in Quarter 3 and continuing to be top of mind for businesses.

Employers still bringing on interns were faced with many changes to the process. The question transitioned quickly to: “How do we deliver on these shared expectations, while keeping everyone safe and up to date on the ever-fluid changes at school and work?” Collectively, higher education and the business community moved to grappling with issues that could impact the internship experience for all:

- Prioritizing the health and safety of every member of the campus and workplace while limiting liability for the organization;
- Protecting and supporting the educational experience and maintaining academic excellence in schools;
- Maximizing productivity, achieving results, and maintaining employee skills-development for businesses;
- Making decisions grounded in values of equity and inclusion;
- Providing timely and transparent communication and obtaining input from student interns and the business community

Regular communication and even “over sharing” can help solidify the relationship between business and the intern. In difficult times, leaders can show that they value their emerging workforce by asking for their input and ideas. Surveys, progress reports between mentor and intern, and frequent group meetings are beneficial.



A LITTLE TIME/A GREAT IMPACT

With these considerations in mind, businesses have adjusted their summer internships to meet the new reality. They sought out new ways to incorporate students into the organization's culture through micro and virtual experiences that could meet both the needs of the student and the business.

Valued Chamber member JP Morgan Chase was able to still place over 260 summer interns in their Columbus market for 2020. Students from Columbus and all over the world, participated in an abbreviated 5-week micro experience, as opposed to the usual 10-weeks.

Student interns still walked away with not only a proven body of work, and JP Morgan Chase identified the possible next generation of leaders for the Columbus market.

Eliminating the internship program would have negatively impacted Chase's recruitment efforts, as the summer program is part of a key strategy for identifying talent. The company continues to invest in each student intern by paying them the full amount of a 10-week work experience.

"We made a commitment to thousands of extremely talented young people. Keeping our commitment to them, despite all of the challenges brought on by COVID-19, was the most important thing we could have done to reinforce our culture and show them who we are as a company. It would have been easy for the interns to go through the motions for five weeks, accept their pay, and walk away with JPMorgan Chase on their resume. They didn't. They were hungry, leaning in, and taking in everything they could absorb. No excuses. It was great to see."

Jeff Lyttle, Executive Director, JP Morgan Chase



FROM A DISTANCE

Shifting the traditional in-office intern experience to a virtual one can present some challenges for businesses. Companies are now tasked with answering: “Do we have the technological capability?” How will we make a true connection with the intern?” “Who will lead and monitor the efforts?”

Technological capability: Businesses that had invested in the technology and infrastructure necessary for remote work before and immediately following the onset of the pandemic were better prepared to transition to virtual internships. The disruption caused by Covid-19 has revealed many opportunities for companies that were not as prepared to address their technology needs. Columbus is fortunate in having affordable digital access, setting the City apart from other areas where exists a true digital divide. It is a good practice to identify your business needs and determine a training/work plan that can be done remotely. Some businesses are finding that their intern pool is larger by moving the entire experience to a shortened one, performed 100% virtually. This gives your organization greater choicer and flexibility in sourcing talent and creating a more diverse pipeline.

Making a connection with the intern: Successful companies have created programs that are highly interactive and translate the corporate culture and values, without everyone congregating in an office setting. Clearly, this requires more planning and deliberate focus. Well-designed programs provide opportunities for peer interaction, professional networking and quality, meaningful work. We all admit, that nothing quite replicates gathering the team in person at a ballgame or off-site retreat. However, virtual interactions that have the same intent can still be incorporated into the intern experience. Virtual Happy hours, coffee meet ups and regularly scheduled team meetings are highly encouraged. Remember: the intern experience is also a reflection on your company’s investment in its people. Make sure that the impression is a positive one that shines light on your workplace practice.

A successful internship has always included well-articulated learning goals and outcomes, aligned to the company’s expectations. The remote environment requires that those be much more strongly articulated up front and monitored by a dedicated internal team member. Utilize chat functions to help address easy questions. Sharing positive feedback and celebrating accomplishments as a team is another great way to build camaraderie and help students feel integrated into their host organization.



Leading the effort: As we have stressed, a mentor is an important and even essential part of how employees and businesses grow. This was true prior to the necessitated shift to remote work, and it remains true today.

Assign interns a dedicated mentor who will act as their guide and provide feedback on projects and work flow, and meet virtually on a regular basis to discuss progress.

Develop a work plan for the intern, training materials, activities and tools that the intern will need to be successful in the virtual world.

Define expectations for both the intern and the supervisor/mentor and assure they are agreed upon before the start of the internship. Provide opportunity for reflection and integration of the work and learning.

So far in 2020, our trusted business leaders, colleges/universities and student interns have proven that even disruption can provide insight and growth. Our workforce can weather difficult days through collaboration and shared goals. We encourage all Chamber members to consider starting, continuing or revamping your internship program as a workforce solution, and lean on the Chamber to assist you in that process.

To access the Columbus Chamber's most recent Experience Series program highlighting best practices for connecting to interns in a virtual world, [click here](#) and enter password ES102020.

And to learn more about other pertinent workforce topics like virtual hiring and training, managing a work from home team and maintaining a culture in a virtual world, [click here](#).

CONTACT YOUR COLUMBUS CHAMBER

Are you a Chamber member looking for guidance and direction on your workforce strategy?

You can schedule a meeting with Workforce Development Director Kelly Fuller to discuss the best ways to attract and retain talent in today's workforce, as well as ways to build a strong company culture.

KellyFuller@Columbus.org
(614) 225-6084

