

OPINION

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Guest Opinion

Don't wait until college when considering internship

Dick Knight

Congratulations to Aliza Earnshaw and The Business Journal on an outstanding in-depth Focus on education (Sept. 3, 2004).

These articles very appropriately highlighted the key role that undergraduate industry internships play in preparing young engineers. Nationwide, these programs provide a highly regarded career development path. For a young person who has chosen the engineering profession, there is no better way to kick-start a career!

However, it may come as a surprise that one of our most competitive and eagerly sought-after internship opportunities is offered, not in college, but in high school. For 21 years Saturday Academy has been making connections between talented high school students and companies interested in encouraging promising students to select technical careers.

Its Apprenticeships in Science and Engineering program has provided summer internships to over 2,300 students. Students flock to this program despite the long odds of being selected. In fact, on average, four highly qualified young men and women apply for each position.

An ASE internship makes a huge difference in the lives of the high school freshmen, sophomores and juniors who are selected. These are important foundational years for students who will pursue a technical career, and it is critical that students choose to take classes that will enable success in college and beyond.

An ASE apprentice gains real world experience to guide these key life choices. In the words of Drew Shepardson, a senior at Clackamas High School, "Working at Planar this summer has allowed me to get a taste of not only how companies handle big projects but also what it would be like working as an engineer in one of the fastest-growing companies in Oregon."

College internship programs are well recognized and an "easy sell" to companies due to the short path to employment and the expectation that useful work will be accomplished at a bargain price. However, high school internships are a new concept to many.

Company participation must be driven by a slightly longer-term and more strategic view: The recognition that filling the college pipeline with motivated, well-prepared students is the best path to maintain our international and local technology competitiveness. But make no mistake, these young students are very productive. It is great fun to listen to excited industry mentors rave about the results their ASE interns produce.

Steve Bennett, a researcher at Intel Corp., commented, "We love having these students come in during the summer to do real work and make good progress on a project."

These students do grow up to contribute directly to Oregon's economy.

Just ask Steve Rosenbaum, an intern in 1991, who founded Pop Art, a successful Internet services firm. Or ask Jennifer Matson, an intern in biomedical research in 1994, who recently returned to Oregon to work in research at Biotronik.

Since an ASE intern costs only a fraction of a college intern, it is easy to see that a company can "do well while doing good" without breaking the bank. So the next time you plan a college internship program, think about adding a few high school interns. It is a great way to increase the pool of highly qualified Oregon students who will be the key to our community's future in the knowledge economy.

Dick Knight is a retired high-tech executive who devotes his time to science and engineering education. He chairs the advisory board of Youth Exploring Science and co-chaired the team that brought Intel ISEF, "the largest pre-college science fair in the world" to Portland in May 2004. For more information on the ASE program, please go to www.saturdayacademy.org, or contact Dick at knight@hevanet.com.