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Real world experience:

Daytona State College internship, co-op programs benefit both students, area businesses

By LAURIE HAHN
BUSINESS WRITER

Giving students real-world experience in their chosen career fields through internships and cooperative programs with area employers is an important goal for Daytona State College.

So is helping those students land jobs after they graduate.

“Co-ops and internships are important because they give students the opportunity to have real work experiences, not just working on projects dreamed up by professors,” said Mike Vitale, senior vice president for academic affairs at Daytona State College. “Students are working on projects through real businesses that need real solutions.”

A successful internship and co-op program needs close collaboration between education and industry, said Jayne Fifer, president of the Volusia Manufacturers Association.

“We are working very closely with (Daytona State and other area schools) to build the relationship with the manufacturer so that we can get interns into the manufacturing companies,” Fifer said.

Mary Bruno, an associate vice president at Daytona State, said the college has advisory committees to help find employers who can offer co-ops and internships.

“It’s important to listen to what business and industry is saying and offer programs that meet their needs,” she said.

Internships and co-ops are offered in a variety of fields, Vitale said. “We have students in co-ops in city and county government, in manufacturing, teaching in school districts and working in the health field.”

He said in the last academic year, 205 Daytona State students participated in the co-op program, 109 had internships and 291 were involved in clinical experiences in the health care field, such as physical therapy and nursing.

“It’s a very good stepping stone into a business or into a specific corporation,” he said. “From the business perspective, because they’ve seen the value of it, they recognize that the student did bring something positive to their business.”

That was the experience of Abigail Henning, who graduated from Daytona State with an associate's degree in AutoCAD design in December 2010. She started a co-op position at Daytona Beach manufacturer Crane Cams in March of that year and after graduation her position became full-time.

“The co-op definitely helped me get the job,” she said.

Her husband, Chris, who also has an associate's degree from Daytona State, had a co-op position at Hudson Technologies. He now works for the Ormond Beach manufacturer full-time while pursuing a bachelor's degree through Daytona State's engineering technology program.

Vitale said a co-op is usually of a shorter duration or for a single project while an internship may be a full semester or more. Both may be paid or unpaid positions, but if the position is unpaid, the student must be earning college credit.

Developing new avenues for students to pursue internships and co-ops is the goal of a new Florida grant program called TR.A.D.E. (Transferring Resources for Accelerated Degrees and Employment), which receives funding from the U.S. Department of Labor. Bruno said the grant is aimed at veterans, the unemployed and under-employed workers already in the manufacturing field. Daytona State has been selected to receive $850,000 from the program to provide training for these non-traditional students.

Bruno said the training will focus first on welding and machining, since there is a demand among local manufacturers for employees with those skills.

The TR.A.D.E. pilot program at Daytona State will start in June.

Fifer said the program could provide her member companies with badly needed skilled workers.

“It’s a partnership,” Fifer said of the relationship between her group and Daytona State. “We’re both on a mission to get this job done.”

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