

Student Engagement – A Valuable Resource for Businesses

College students today are looking for real life/work experiences sometimes called experiential learning or student engagement. Each school has its own format and rules which vary depending on curriculum requirements. Details can be found on their individual websites but here is a general explanation of what you can expect, with tips to make the process easier.

Classroom projects: work within the curriculum of a particular class and take the entire semester to complete. Find out what their deadlines are and when the project will be completed. Professors monitor students and generally don't allow them to deviate from the syllabus. If they're working on a marketing plan, please don't ask them to create your social media pages. Students hate to say no and then it becomes awkward. Many professors are hands-off and you won't hear from them at all. The students are expected to handle questions or problems that may arise. They receive credit and a grade and put this work in their portfolio. It may be seen by others so if there is any reason you don't want this information public, this isn't the format for you! Also, make very sure you understand what information may be needed from you, i.e. financial, technical, customer, competition, etc. Are you comfortable with sharing this? If you get involved with a classroom project, ask to see an outline or syllabus and email the professor if you don't understand the goals or final outcomes.

Internships and Co-ops: This format may be changing due to a recent federal court ruling. A production company was found not to be in compliance with federal and state labor laws because they were not paying students for tasks that would normally be performed by a paid employee. Internships must be part of a training program and for the benefit of the intern. The rules were clarified in 2012, so you want to be sure you're in compliance when you develop a program for your company. Details can be found at <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.pdf>. Receiving class credit is also now being challenged, so don't make assumptions that your program is safe because its part of a classroom sanctioned internship.

Students are looking for paid internships anyway so you'll be at a disadvantage if you can't pay them. They are all looking for a meaningful learning experience and something that will look good on their resume! Take the time to mentor them so they can learn about your business and industry. They'll have a great experience and you'll be amazed at what you'll learn from them. Students today are very involved with school activities, homework, clubs, community service, sports and many times more than one job, so patience may be needed when trying to schedule around an intern's availability. How flexible can you be? Each school has its own type of internship program and may even differ between disciplines...some programs require internships while others don't. If the students are receiving credit, they'll need to work a set number of hours during the semester (130+). Can you fulfill this requirement?

Career Services, Career Development Center: Each school has some type of career services department to help you post a job description so students can find you. These jobs do not need to follow a curriculum or necessarily have rules about the number of hours but students accessing career services are usually looking for pay.

Community Service: The schools vary in their requirements for community service although it usually (but not always) entails non-profit work. It doesn't hurt to inquire if you have an interesting business or type of experience that a student would really benefit from.

Work Study: usually reserved for non-profits and generally found on campus. Restrictions apply.

Career Fairs and Campus Recruiting Programs: Career fairs may be held several times a year and this is a great venue to find employees. Fees may be charged but it is well worth it to get your name known among students and faculty.

Other: Many times students look for ways to expand their portfolios or resumes. If a student seeks you out and you're interested in their skills make sure the work doesn't fall under new internship rulings and have a clear understanding of how the material will be used (and who owns it). This work often ends up on students' personal websites or YouTube so prospective employers can see their skills.

Finding Students:

*Each school has a website for employers to post jobs online. Look up Career Services, Internship Coordinator or other similar titles. Many use platforms such as Handshake, which makes it easy to choose more than one school to work with.

*Students may seek you out if they're working on a class project or need credit. If students shop or eat at your business, ask them if they know of any students looking for a business to work with.

Questions to ask:

Have the students signed a Confidentiality Agreement? Feel free to explain what confidentiality means to you!

How much time do the students need from you?

How will the students contact you and how long do you have to answer their requests? Students won't call you so if email doesn't work for you (or texting) make other arrangements up front!

What happens if the world goes 'remote' again? Can your company accommodate that situation? What research projects have you been putting off? Do you know what your competition is doing? What Gen Y or Z insight can be utilized? There are many ways to keep a student 'employed', so think outside the box, and keep the relationship going.

Will there be a final presentation and are you invited? When will you get a copy of their report (or finished project)?

Working with students can be very rewarding as long as you know what to expect from the beginning. This is only one small part of the college experience and while a very important one, it has to fit in with their needs and requirements. You're giving back and in return, you'll receive a product or service to greatly enhance your business.