

Factors that Rendered George Washington University the Best School for Internships



Earlier in 2015, the Princeton Review announced the Best Schools for Internships¹. Ranked on top was the George Washington University (GW). What sets GW apart from the rest of the schools in the country? Michael McKenzie at the School's Center for Career Services offered his insights into the possible reasons: location; hard working students; and university-wide support for career experience.

Located in the Heart of National/International Affairs

I believe one of the biggest reasons GW was rated highly is thanks to our location. Our main campus is only four blocks away from the White House, and there are international organizations in the vicinity, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Washington D.C. is well known for having an abundance of internship opportunities. Some of our schools have adjuncts from the government and international organizations, teaching a class at night. They have a lot of credibility in the industry, and understand how the skills and knowledge are translated into the workplace.

Actively Engaged Students

Another reason might be the students' nature. GW students are known for being smart and hardworking. Not only do they study hard, but they are involved in the community. Even though most of our programs do not require internships for the degree, so many students participate in internships on their own initiative². Public organizations as well as a variety of private companies from Google, Facebook to top consulting firms visit our campus seeking such students. The purpose of their visit might be to have a profile on campus and recruit students, or it might be to help students

learn what they need to work in the industry, and connect how the classroom knowledge applies to the industry.

Professors, Career Coaches and Alumni All Work Together to Support Students

The third reason I can think of is the level of support that our students receive at school. Faculty and staff actively assist students in securing internships. Having a reference³ from an expert in the industry adds to the student's credibility, increasing the likelihood of landing a better internship. Additionally, alumni who are active in various industries/fields, families and members of school councils all offer information and support.

GW is fortunate because the university's president has made a conscious decision to invest in career services. We have more than 30 staff at the center. With more resources and more coaches, we have the capacity to reach out to academic programs and figure out how to collaborate together. Having a structure in place that allows all of us to work toward the same goal is the greatest strength at GW, in my opinion.

Roles of Career Exploration Coaches and Industry Coaches

I would say GW has a unique coaching model with career exploration coaches and industry coaches. Career exploration coaches focus on students setting their goals, trying to understand their needs and helping them envision what they want to be in the future. They often teach skills, everything from self-assessment, to how to research employers across different industries, to how to match these up with your own skills, values and interests. Particularly in liberal arts degrees, there is no direct track to a particular profession. So coaches collaborate with students to connect the dots between what they study and what industries they can work in. Sometimes students wish for more responsibility or a different type of work at the internship, and coaches give them advice on communication and negotiation skills in a professional setting. In addition, they advise on entry level jobs on and off campus, and help students gain basic skills, professionalism and broad transferrable skills.

On the other hand, industry coaches specialize in particular industries. Based on their past experience and networks, they teach students how to job search in the particular industry, tell them about necessary industry-specific skills, and what kind of working environment it is going to be. Last year, our office co-sponsored Industry Weeks with academic schools, a program that focused on specific industries to

promote understanding among students. U.S. employers expect new graduates to possess transferrable skills, industry knowledge, and understand jargon. Industry Weeks can be helpful to learn about these, and internships provide the skills that you cannot get without being in the environment.

Rising Interest in Entrepreneurship and Need for Early Career Planning

One recent trend that I have noticed is the growing interest among our students in entrepreneurship. We have many students who intern at startups. Some of them do so because they want to start their own company later in their life while others do so for the excitement of learning how they operate.

Our hope at the Center for Career Services is to get students thinking about their careers early in their academic lives. We want to help students understand the industry they want to get into and make decisions early on. It depends on the industry how early you need to begin acting. Computer sciences, engineering, financing and consulting fields make decisions very early, because building skillsets and getting experience are emphasized more there. If you intern as a sophomore and the employer wants to see you return as a junior, they may eventually want to hire you on a permanent basis.

■ George Washington University

A private institution that was founded in 1821. It is ranked 54th on the National Universities ranking in 2015⁴. It has an enrollment of approx. 10,000 undergraduate and 14,000 graduate students. Alumni include the former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and numerous politicians and public figures.

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Michael oversees a student support services unit that consists of career coaches. Prior to working at GW, he was at Johns Hopkins University's career center and was a career coach in Azerbaijan. He also has an experience in Japan teaching graduate school preparation courses for professionals.

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON, DC

This column has been posted to the website of Recruit Works Institute.

Footnotes:

1. The Princeton Review, Top Internship Opportunities
2. Internship/co-op participation rate among the 2013 graduates is 69%.
<http://survey.gwu.edu/graduation> (accessed 7/6/2015)
3. During the hiring process, U.S. employers generally require references from individuals who have seen the candidate in a professional setting, such as professors and past employers.
4. U.S. News & World Report, Best Colleges: National Universities Ranking