

# The Handpicked Intern

Finding the Next Generation of Employees

**T**ODAY'S COLLEGE STUDENTS, especially those in the high-demand fields of cybersecurity, systems engineering, cloud computing and network engineering, want it all when it comes to an internship. No administrative work for them; they expect substantive career-building roles.

And top government contracting firms, eager to build their next generation workforce, are more than willing to deliver.

In fact, the creative methods government contractors are using to handpick and win over interns have become



Bosken

key components of hiring strategy.

"IT is the targeted skill set for most of our internship positions," said **Jerry Bosken**, senior vice president of human resources for **NJVC**.

"But we also recruit students in a variety of other disciplines, including communications, accounting and finance, supply chain and human resources."

## Recruiting Outside the Box

As competition grows, college-recruiting fairs and internet postings don't cut it. Recruiters targeting potential future employees long before they shake the dean's hand and collect a degree.

"Our college recruiters build strategic relationships with diverse and technical student organizations, faculty,



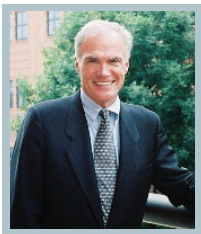
Huldin

administrators and career-center representatives," said **Boeing Network and Space Systems** Director of Human Resources **Liz Huldin**. "We also maintain relationships virtually through the use of various social media channels like Facebook."

But that's not to say it's an intern's market; it's still tough out there. At **Booz Allen Hamilton**, the intern hiring process is similar to that of hiring for regular employees. The company takes deliberate steps to widen its intern pipeline through proactive outreach to specific technical academic programs. After a large number

of candidates are screened, the strongest go through a competitive process that includes a behavioral-based interview.

In identifying and recruiting top interns, the partnership between companies and academic institutions remains strong. **George Mason University**, long a source of interns for many government contractors, welcomes some companies' top technical employees as

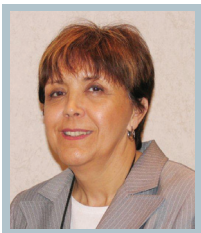


Griffiths

adjunct instructors. As instructors meet and mentor students, they're scouting for their company's next superstars. As GMU's Dean of the **Volgenau School of Engineering** **Lloyd Griffiths** pointed out, "This first-hand look at students allows

companies to quickly decide which students they want to approach regarding employment."

Many government contractors aren't well known among college students, so building the brand on campus is critical to attracting top students. "We have built strong



Mentus

relationships with colleges and universities across the country," said **Margo Mentus** acting senior vice president of human resources for **ManTech**. "Maintaining these with students and faculty is essential to recruiting quality interns."

With intern hiring now seen as a significant part of business-building strategy, companies are in a competitive

## What Makes for a Good Internship Program?

For companies looking to ramp up or enhance their current internship programs, executives offered these practical recommendations and lessons learned:

**Develop a program review process.** Successful programs are constantly reviewed to ensure a quality experience for both the intern and the company. Best-practice forums and intern surveys help to solicit feedback and ideas for program improvements or enhancements.

**Establish clear, defined job goals and responsibilities.** For interns to understand their roles and how they'll fit in your organization, treat them as you

## Making the Grade

Even with today's competitive environment, being accepted as an intern is no sure thing. Students must meet a strict set of requirements in virtually every company, especially companies serving clients in the federal government. While internship requirements vary, most look for students with a high GPA; coursework and/or knowledge and skills specific to the desired role; demonstrated leadership ability; and examples of community involvement.

position. "Many government contractors in the Washington metropolitan area are looking for similar education and skill sets in their employees, so hiring the 'best and brightest' can be a challenge," said Bosken.

## Keeping It Real

Even while they're still in school, many in this new class of interns work year round and perform real jobs for real pay, making the term "summer intern" sound more and more dated. "The greatest change I have seen over the past few years is the willingness of companies to hire students as interns over the full year rather than only during summers," Dean Griffiths noted.

And they're not fetching takeout and stuffing binders. Interns are expected to be productive contributors—learning the business, meeting with customers, assimilating into the culture and gaining an understanding of the company's mission. "Our goal is always to try

would every employee. Managers should establish a close, nurturing relationship with the intern by setting clear job expectations, providing ample instruction and guiding the intern to the resources they'll need.

**Offer career development and learning opportunities.** At Booz Allen, interns are provided information about the internship program prior to starting and then participate in a one-day onboarding program that outlines key steps for a successful internship. And at Northrop Grumman, many interns participate in mentoring programs, executive speaker series, engagement with senior leadership and community-service activities. They are also encouraged to collaborate with interns on other team projects.

## To Pay or Not to Pay

The decision to pay interns is one made by each company and is typically based on the complexity of their role and the special skill set they bring. Most government contractors also sponsor interns for an applicable security clearance of certification if warranted by the assigned project. According to the 2011 National Association of Colleges and Employers Student Survey, graduates who took part in a paid internship were more likely to get a job offer, have a job in hand by the time they graduated and receive a higher starting salary offer than their peers who undertook an unpaid internship or no internship at all.

to identify opportunities for interns to work directly with our employees and with government customers to provide them with relevant and meaningful experiences,” Mentus said.

At Boeing, internships are seen as an opportunity to provide good experiences in a student’s field of choice through work on projects that are meaningful to the company. If someone is going into programming, they’ll have a specific project assignment within a team, attend team meetings and contribute work that could be embedded into the final product. Boeing’s eXMeritus group, which sells secure hardware and software to federal government and law enforcement, brings interns along on customer visits so they learn what’s happening in the field. “Once candidates are interested in our market and have the credentials, our job is to keep them engaged,” Huldin said. “We live in a world where people see their career tied to their market, more than to a company.”



Clifton

This commitment to delivering a positive intern experience is shared by CACI as well. “We embrace the notion that an internship is a rich learning experience for the intern, the manager and the company as a whole,” said **CACI International** vice president of recruiting **Larry Clifton**.

To learn more about the internship programs highlighted in this article, contact:

**Booz Allen Hamilton** – Christopher Carlson at carlson\_christopher@bah.com.

**Boeing Network and Space Systems** – www.boeing.com/careers/collegecareers/.

**CACI International** – Sarah Simmons at ssimmons@caci.com.

**ManTech** – David Willard at david.willard@mantech.com.

**NJVC** – Mary Homer at mary.homer@njvc.com.

**Northrop Grumman** – universityrelations@ngc.com.

“Every intern brings a fresh academic perspective, unbounded enthusiasm, and cutting-edge knowledge that management can leverage to execute their programs, boost team productivity and assess the intern’s potential for future employment. Interns get exposed to a corporate work environment where they gain expertise by tackling real-life challenges, ranging from conducting market research on government mobile applications to testing and evaluating U.S. Marine Corps helicopter components.”

To accommodate this shift in the internship paradigm, colleges are adjusting schedules and expectations. Often, an intern is hired for the full year, then, if there is a specific need for the intern’s skill set, hours per week are increased. This continues until the students are working full-time, generally during senior year. George Mason now even offers evening courses in the upper-division undergraduate level and in all of its graduate courses, so that working interns can attend and graduate on time.

If done well, a corporate internship program can provide a steady pipeline of specialized skills and talent. In fact, the companies profiled in this article hire, on average, 70 percent of their interns into permanent positions. And this trend is expected to continue. As noted by GMU’s Dean Lloyd Griffiths, “We have not seen any decline in demand for our student interns. If anything, it has increased in areas that involve cloud computing, wireless and security. The demand is far greater than our supply of students.” **GCE**

### Lee Frothingham

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