

The Value of SH&E Interns for Companies

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Introduction

This paper will focus on the value of internships for businesses, students and the safety, health and environmental (SH&E) profession. It will consist of two major parts. The first part will include an overview of what studies of SH&E internships have shown us about internships—the advantages, issues, and problems. The second part will be a case study of LyondellBasell's intern program, which will give a good overview of internships from one company's perspective and provide practical ideas on how to set up an internship program.

The emphasis is to summarize how interns can assist companies in improving their SH&E programs and how companies can get the most out of their interns. We hope to get readers who have never had a SH&E intern to seriously consider hosting one, and for readers who have existing programs, to provide information that would improve their program and make the internship experience more useful for companies and students

In summary, this presentation will assist someone who is thinking about hosting an intern, and for those companies who already have interns it will give ideas about how to improve what they are now doing. It also addresses the society's concerns of getting more students to enroll and graduate from occupational and health academic programs and to improve academic preparation of future SH&E professionals.

Advantages of Internships

Advantages of Internships for Students

In academic terms an internship is considered a type of “experiential learning.” This is learning that occurs from actually doing something rather than just listening or reading or observing. While there is certainly a place for listening, reading and observing, actually doing and experiencing first-hand has no replacement. This is why an internship, where a student basically spends at least three months working 40 hours a week, is frequently eye-opening for students.

A properly structured internship allows students to:

- Apply classroom learning to real-world situations. It makes the classroom material become real and applied instead of just information.
- Explore personal and career interests & goals. Is this profession what I really want to do? Is the construction industry really for me?
- Experience different work cultures. Learn how to get things done in different cultures such as in a union shop.
- Understand the scope of responsibilities, role and duties of the SH&E professional.
- Learn how to function as part of a multi-disciplinary team. How to work with other SH&E professionals as well as human resources, engineering, management and others.
- Learn and practice work skills. Even though they may have studied and even wrote a draft safety plan of some type, to write a safety plan in a company that will actually be used is a totally different thing. This experience is invaluable.
- Enhance job prospects after graduation. The more real-world experience a graduate has the more employable they are.
- Make money during the internship. It is standard practice in the SH&E field to pay interns for their time and the students usually need the money.

Advantages for Business

Having SH&E interns has many advantages for business, such as:

- An additional set of hands, eyes, and a brain to get work done. Almost all companies have a long list of “things to do” and an intern can help to accomplish more of these things that would not get done otherwise.
- Get special projects done. It is common for an intern to be given one or two special projects during the internship. This gives them the opportunity to do something significant, gives them more experience and allows the company to get something important done.
- Bring new ideas and energy. Because they are new to the company and the profession, interns will see things with different eyes. They may ask questions about things that no one ever asked before and cause people to rethink why certain things are done the way they are. Also, students are more commonly in their young twenties and may have more energy and have ideas that no one in the company thought about before.
- Screen for hiring. For a company wanting to fill a position, having an intern is an excellent way to screen for the “fit” of the intern for a permanent position. Because of the length of an internship, if monitored properly, a company can get a much better “picture” of the individual than just through interviews or a resume. Also, if the individual is not someone you would care to work with for several years, it is real easy at the end of the internship to thank them for their work and wish them the best. This is much easier than releasing an employee already hired.
- Being a good corporate citizen by helping to train future SH&E professionals. This helps the student, the profession and corporate America.

Study Results

The below information is based on the results from studies on internships performed by Kraemer (1992), McGlothlin (2003) and Fender (2005). All three of these studies complemented each other and focused on the safety, health and environmental area. Students who had completed

internships were asked a series of questions relating to their experience and the significant findings are below.

Positive Aspects

What students said they enjoyed most about their internship experience, with the most frequent responses listed first:

- Opportunity to gain real-world experience.
 - Working with a union.
 - Observing how to act in a professional manner.
 - Noting the interaction at staff meetings.
 - Learning details about workers' comp.
- How to communicate with upper management.
- See how SH&E is applied in the work setting.
- Having a high level of responsibility.
- Being trusted to work on a project independently.
- Learning how to stick with a project until it is finished.
- Helped them to decide if this was a field they wanted to work in.
- Most believed that their internship was worthwhile.
- Increased self-confidence.
- Interacting with people.
- Learning from experienced employees.
- Working closely with mentors.
- Having recommendations taken seriously by the company.

Negative Aspects

What students enjoyed least:

- Not having enough to do.
- Doing repetitive clerical work.
- Company not prepared for their arrival.
- Perceived lack of respect due to age or gender.
- Temporary status.
- Management resistance to safety compliance.
- Getting used to regular hours.
- Early start times.
- Lack of challenging work.

Recommendations to Address Problems

As far as the interns were concerned, the biggest problems revolved around the company:

- Companies must think about what they want the intern to do before they arrive and have a plan to get them oriented, get necessary paperwork completed and get them started.
- Companies or supervisors need to think through special projects and make sure the projects are within the reasonable expectations of what the intern should be able to do and be prepared to adjust if the conclusions were incorrect.
- Properly guide and supervise the intern.

- The intern supervisor must insure that good communication exists between themselves and the intern. Interns frequently aren't familiar with corporate culture and may not feel free to speak up, so it is important for their supervisor to keep communication open.
- Remember what it is like to come to a new place where you don't know what is going on and don't know anyone. Provide lots of information and don't assume that the intern knows where and who you are talking about; confirm that they understand.
- For most interns it will be the first time to work in a management-related position and they may not fully understand the various pressures and expectations. This would include areas such as protocol and accepted boundaries as well as not grasping social issues like gossip and company politics. They may also be reluctant to ask for help or for clarification because some interns will think that it shows weakness.

Managing Intern Programs—a Company Perspective

At LyondellBasell we believe that hiring top talent from college will enable us to build and sustain a high caliber workforce. We feel that through the continuous development of that talent into our leaders of tomorrow we can maintain a competitive advantage in our industry.

The goals of our college relations program are:

- To identify, attract and hire the best campus talent for full-time, cooperative education, and internship opportunities
- To give our co-ops and interns challenging, meaningful work while providing the training and mentoring needed to succeed
- To allow students with multiple work terms to rotate through various work groups and facilities and learn about the many career opportunities at LyondellBasell
- To provide students and LyondellBasell the opportunity to assess each other in consideration for full-time employment upon graduation

Why have Interns?

From the company perspective, in addition to the reasons that were just discussed, the intern also provides us with:

- An additional SH&E resource. We can't always justify a headcount increase. The internship is an avenue to get that additional resource, for shorter time spans over the year, with increasing the headcount.
- A way of completing critical projects. Many of us don't have the time to spend on only one project. After all, we have a plant to run. The internship program can be set up so that the intern has time to focus strictly on one or two projects during their tenure. As a result, you get the project done that never seems to be able to make it to the top of your day to day priority list.
- A possible specific technical expertise. Depending on where the intern is in their academic process, many interns have specialized knowledge in certain facets of the SH&E field. Also, many interns have had prior internships with other companies. They may have had a prior project very similar to what you need done.
- They bring a fresh perspective on SH&E. Many of us have been doing what we do for quite a while. Interns normally haven't had the chance to get into the rut of that's the way we've

always done it. They ask questions that many of us haven't thought of for quite some time.

- A chance to evaluate the candidate(s) for a full time position. Whether we are looking for a full-time hire or not, we are always looking for that “shining star” that we just have to hire.

How do we get started?

Now that we have decided to host an intern, what do we need to do to get started? Whether you are with a large company or a small one, there are a few things that we need to do before we just run out and hire an intern. These things need to be done in order to ensure a successful internship for both the company and the intern.

- Establish support structure – In a large company, recruiting from multiple schools, you may want to implement a team approach. We identified recruiting team leads that are past graduates of the schools that we recruit from.
- Define needs and expectations:
 - What location(s) have project(s) that need to be done?
 - What are those projects?
 - When are the projects needed to be completed?
 - Can an intern complete the project in one term? Typically, a term only runs 13-15 weeks.
 - Will the intern also have other daily responsibilities?
 - Determine required level of expertise/maturity
 - Gain organizational approvals for intern position
- Identify schools that you plan on recruiting from. Consider the following factors:
 - Curriculum – Does the school curriculum support the fulfillment of your identified needs?
 - Reputation – ask about prospective schools within your networking circles. Research school rankings. Is the school curriculum accredited? Does your company currently employ alumni from the school?
 - Location – sometimes it is easier to recruit for positions “closer to home”.
 - Past performance of interns / graduates – if your company has sponsored interns in the past, was their performance acceptable for your goals?
- Selecting an intern:
 - Establish minimum qualifications. There is a catch 22 here. Ideally, you would like to be able sponsor an intern for more than one term. This will allow you to evaluate an intern's performance more than once. On the other hand, if you are looking for an intern with more experience, you will most likely not have that opportunity.
 - You can pre-screen internship candidates through their resume. Realize that most students will not have a lot of experience in the SH&E field. You will have to look for other indicators of the level of expertise that you seek. One such indicator is leadership roles in campus or other organizations.
 - Set up your interviews. Normally we go to the university and spend a day conducting face-to-face interviews. We normally set up an information session the day prior so that we can put out company information at that time rather than to tie up

- interview time. Students that do well on the face-to-face interviews are normally invited for a second phone interview with a different member of our team.
- During the interviews we also give the candidate an opportunity to tell us what kind of project they are looking for and any regional preferences. We try to match candidates to their fields of interest.
 - If all goes well, the candidate will receive an offer within a couple of weeks from the initial interview.
- **Managing interns – On-boarding –** It is important to be ready when the intern shows up to work. As we said before, the term normally runs 13-15 weeks. This is not much time, especially if you haven't already planned out what you want done. You will need to have a work area prepared. You will need to include computer access (including access to any files or directories that will be needed). There will need to be an orientation for the intern. This should include any required safety training. If any special personal protective equipment is required, such as fire retardant clothing, you will also have to plan for the amount of time that it takes to order and receive it. Schedule time to review initial projects. The intern should also be introduced to key members of the facility staff in order to establish them as part of the team.
 - **Mentoring –** Each intern should be assigned a mentor. Ideally, the mentor should not be the interns' supervisor. The mentor should be the person that the intern goes to for guidance and help with their projects. The mentor should be a senior level employee that the intern can talk to informally on a regular basis.
 - **Supervising –** The intern's supervisor is responsible for setting reasonable and measurable objectives for the intern at the beginning of the assignment. The supervisor should have periodic formal reviews with the intern. The supervisor also completes the final review at the end of the internship.

Closing Thoughts

- During the internship, it is important to arrange for face time with senior leadership. This allows the intern to find out more about your company and helps them make decisions on where they want their career to go.
- Make efforts to determine areas needing development early on in the internship and try to help develop those needs.
- Don't ignore the personal needs of interns. For some, this might be the first opportunity they have had to live in the "real world." They may need a little encouragement.
- Encourage informal networks. We like to sponsor "get-togethers" with other engineers, interns, and management. If we have more than one intern in the area for one term we also like to encourage them to invite each other to their facility for tours and/or reviews of their projects.
- We want the internship to be a win-win situation for all involved.

Summary

Internships are valuable for students, businesses and the profession. Managed properly, students get irreplaceable hands-on experience, companies can get needed assistance and work performed, and ultimately the SH&E profession will have better-prepared graduates entering and advancing the profession.

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