

Student Internships and the Privilege to Work

Heather Steffen

My father was unemployed for a year starting in April 2009. A 59-year-old business systems analyst with 30-plus years experience and a newly minted bachelor of business administration in information systems (*summa cum laude*), his recession hobby was attending workshops for the redundant. At Chagrin Valley Job Seekers, guest speakers cited an “experience gap” as the cause of my father’s continuing unemployment. The “experience gap,” according to those employment experts, is the gulf between what your transcript says you know and what you’ve used in a real work environment.¹ For new college graduates, it’s always been an obstacle. To bridge it, students have increasingly turned to internships, and in the last few years, so have unemployed professionals. According to Steve Rodems of Fast Track Internships, only 1 percent of Fast Track’s clients were college graduates already in the workforce and changing professions in 2008, but in 2009 that number exploded to 10 percent. The website InternQueen.com recently began hooking up companies offering “alternative internships” with its newfound adult client base, serving employers like Sara Lee looking to fill “returnship” programs (Farnsworth). Since our slide into recession, more and more businesses, large and small, are turning to low-wage or unpaid interns “to get the extra work done” (Chura).

But the intern economy didn’t start as a recession effect. On closer inspection, two decades of increasing reliance on interns in the corporate, nonprofit, and government sectors can be understood as integral to an ongoing crisis facing US labor: the substitution of contract work, permatemping, and similarly precarious arrangements for long-term, secure employment. (My father is now in the ninth month of a seven-month contract job, with little hope of being hired on as a permanent employee when the project is complete.) Though I bracket discussion of older interns and medical students, among many other issues, my goals here are to sketch the major problems with internships for those who work at them, to explain a few of their social costs, and to analyze how the

¹ For more on experience and skill gaps during economic crises and reorganizations, see Collegiate Employment Research Institute.

rhetoric around internships interpellates students into a world of contingent, on-demand work.

What Facts and Figures There Are

More than 100,000 high school, college, and graduate students work as interns for large corporations, small businesses, nonprofit organizations, and the government each year.² There is scant reliable or accessible data on exactly how many students work as interns each year, how many companies offer internships, or what the average rate of compensation is.³ Various newspaper articles have claimed that between 75 and 84 percent of college seniors have held at least one internship, and that as many as 60 percent of seniors have worked as interns multiple times.⁴

About half of all internships do not pay⁵ and many offer only small stipends, though the pay varies widely depending on the field and desirability of the internship. As Mark Oldman, cofounder of Vault, Inc., puts it, “The more glamorous an internship, the less likely it is paid” (qtd. in Lee). Using Princeton Review’s 2005 *Internship Bible*, Sonia Smith “calculated that 52 percent of magazine internships, 54 percent of politics and public-policy internships, 62 percent of TV internships, and 71 percent of radio internships are unpaid” (Smith). Unlike these high visibility, high-demand fields, internships in manufacturing, engineering, or the computer sciences can pay relatively well. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers’ (NACE) 2009 “Experiential Education Survey,” the average hourly wage for an undergraduate intern in 2008-2009 was \$17.13, and for a graduate-level intern it was \$23.18. Further, 98.6

² A rough, and most likely low, estimate arrived at by looking at the *Vault Guide to Top Internships: 2009 Edition*, which lists internship opportunities at 750 companies. The number of internship openings ranges from 10 to 250 per company, and this includes only the companies who work with Vault, Inc.

³ I contacted my university’s Career and Professional Development Center with a list of questions about internships, and the assistant director (after consulting with several colleagues at other schools) replied, “According to my research no one has ever done the survey or research work necessary to gather this information” (Mizgorski). My questions were: 1) What percentage of college students complete an internship while in college? More than one? What percentage of graduate and professional students complete internships? 2) What percentage of interns are eventually hired by the company/nonprofit they work for? What percentage of companies/nonprofits hire from their intern pool? 3) What percentage of internships are unpaid? 4) How much more likely is a student to have a job lined up before they graduate or immediately after if they have completed an internship? 5) How many internships (excluding those for med students) are available nationwide each year?

⁴ See Lee; Kamenetz; and Perlin.

⁵ Again, an estimate; see Kamenetz; and Malveaux.

percent of employers surveyed pay their interns (NACE, “Experiential” 3). These hopeful statistics are undercut, however, by NACE’s skewed sample. Only 318 companies opted to complete the 2009 survey, and the vast majority of them are in sectors that traditionally compensate their interns. For instance, 26 engineering/surveying companies and 22 electrical and electronic machinery and equipment manufacturers responded, versus only two publishers and one “museum and cultural organization.”

No matter the field, internships can last anywhere from a few days to a year, but the classic example is the ten- or twelve-week summer position. Student interns may be involved in basic office chores, shadowing a mentor, or at a deeper level of engagement with an organization’s activities, like participating on a project team. The admittedly limited NACE survey found that interns spend about a third of their labor time working on analytical problems, a quarter overseeing projects, and 20 percent corresponding with customers, clients, and staff members (NACE, “Experiential” 2). Students sometimes enter internships out of curiosity about a particular career path, but most hope that the ultimate compensation for their free or low-wage work will be a good job in the field. These hopes are not misplaced. Just over 77 percent of the employers surveyed by the NACE “say they use their internship programs primarily as a tool for recruiting entry-level talent,” and reported that “an average of 35.3 percent of their full-time entry-level college hires from the class of 2007-08 were from their internship program” (NACE, “Experiential” 2). In 2010, NACE reported that respondents to their “Internship and Co-op Survey” converted 53.5 percent of eligible interns into employees, down from 56.6 percent the previous year (NACE, “Internship” 3). Unsurprisingly, if this is true, students who have had an internship may be as much as 60 to 90 percent more likely than their non-intern peers to obtain a full-time job immediately upon graduation (Cullen). Internships are therefore viewed by many as a smart investment in the future, regardless of the present sacrifices demanded. One former intern comments, “Was my first [internship] exploitation? Of course it was. Did it help me out in the long run? Of course it did” (“John Anthony”). The length of time interns have to wait for the payoff is growing, though, as more employers now require an uncompensated and contingent “internship” period before hiring. Rather than being paid during training, young workers

increasingly discover that “interning leads to nothing except more interning,” as one former intern wrote on the *Guardian*’s blog (Bowen).

Internships as Class Warfare

Little critical attention has been paid to interning as a potentially exploitative and discriminatory labor system.⁶ However, sporadic coverage in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Chronicle of Higher Education* has hit on the two most obvious problems it poses for interns and students:

I. Nice Work if You Can Afford It

The first is the lack of pay or extremely low stipends offered by many employers. The stock defense of unpaid internships is that they are an extension of the apprenticeship model and that employers do not benefit from interns’ labor. There are no specific laws governing unpaid internships, but the Department of Labor’s Wage and Hour Division finally made a move toward addressing the issue in April 2010 when they published Fact Sheet #71: Internship Programs under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) was signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1938 with the goal of establishing a minimum wage and the length of the workweek (\$11 for 44 hours). For its time, the legislation was groundbreaking, but its broad and vague definition of an “employee” as “any individual employed by an employer” – where to “employ” means “to suffer or permit to work” – creates legal ambiguity about interns’ employment status (FLSA 2, 3). Fact Sheet #71 is intended to clarify whether an employer is required to pay an intern in accordance with the FLSA. The determination hangs on whether the internship meets *all of* these six factors:

1. The internship, even though it includes actual operation of the facilities of the employer, is similar to training which would be given in an educational environment;
2. The internship experience is for the benefit of the intern;

⁶ Ross Perlin’s *Intern Nation: How to Earn Nothing and Learn Little in the Brave New Economy*, the first book-length analysis of student internships, will be published by Verso in May 2011.

3. The intern does not displace regular employees, but works under close observation of existing staff;
4. The employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern; and on occasion its operations may actually be impeded;
5. The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship; and
6. The employer and the intern understand that the student is not entitled to wages for the time spent in the internship. (U.S. Dept. of Labor)

If the internship passes this six-part test, “an employment relationship does not exist under the FLSA, and the Act’s minimum wage and overtime provisions do not apply to the intern.”

The Wage and Hour Division (WHD) should be applauded for taking note of the exploitative conditions of internships, but their guidelines do not carry the force of law and run into several other problems: First, they apply only to internships with “‘for-profit’ private sector employers,” thus leaving out the thousands of unpaid interns working for the government and nonprofits (including the Department of Labor itself), though a footnote states that this will be remedied in future. Second, despite the WHD’s assertion that these guidelines are new, they have in fact been around for years, being derived in large part from informal position letters available from the Department of Labor. Clearly they have not yet worked to curb employers’ appetite for free labor, so it is hard to believe that they will have more impact merely by dint of appearing in a fact sheet instead of a letter. Third, the guidelines do not provide for enforcement of the FLSA as it applies to interns. As one commenter on *Chronicle.com* noted, “what student in their right mind would start off a career with a FLSA lawsuit against their internship provider” (“jesor”)? If no agency is assigned to monitor internship situations, it is up to the intern to file a complaint before notice will be taken – a move that could clearly have negative repercussions for that student in the future. Critics of the internship economy consider Fact Sheet #71 a move in the right direction, but a minor one at best because of these three flaws.

The Fact Sheet met immediately with resistance from other quarters as well. In late April 2010, Northeastern University President Joseph E. Aoun, along with twelve others, penned an open letter to Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis arguing that internships are already adequately monitored and assessed by universities.⁷ The presidents urged “great caution in changing an approach to learning that is viewed as a huge success by educators, employers, and students alike” and requested that the Department of Labor “reconsider undertaking the regulation of internships” (Aoun Letter). Aoun further clarified university leaders’ position a few months later, noting that not only would employers be less willing to offer unpaid internships, thus forcing U.S. students to seek more internships overseas, but also that under the guidelines’ “no or minimal work” specification, “internships or co-op positions will deteriorate into job shadowing, a pale imitation of true experiential learning” (Aoun, “Protect”). In the eyes of university administrators, according to Aoun at least, “The quality control is our responsibility” (Lipka, “Leave”).⁸ In May 2010, Democratic Senator John F. Kerry added his voice to those chiding the Department of Labor, writing an open note to Solis praising the benefits of internships and “the need to safeguard students from unpaid labor,” but taking a sharp turn at the closing to express “hope [that] you will consider any potential chilling effects on college internship programs before regulatory steps are taken” (Kerry).

Though they’ve just gained powerful allies, many times the first to defend unpaid internships are interns or former interns. As one “older intern” writes, they offer “something valuable to the intern that cannot be gained at a temp agency” (“Kate”). Unpaid internships, according to this line of reasoning, are a sort of favor to the intern – “a free internship is a gift” for those who “lack the skills” (“Terry”). But who gives and

⁷ The other college presidents who signed the letter were Robert A. Brown (Boston Univ.), Susan A. Cole (Montclair State Univ.), Pamela B. Gann (Claremont McKenna College), Antoine M. Garibaldi (Gannon Univ.), David Maxwell (Drake Univ.), Charles R. Middleton (Roosevelt Univ.), Stephen A. Privett (Univ. of San Francisco), Kevin P. Reilly (Univ. of Wisconsin System), John Sexton (New York Univ.), R. Gerald Turner (Southern Methodist Univ.), Leslie E. Wong (Northern Michigan Univ.), and Mark G. Yudof (Univ. of California).

⁸ That NYU’s John Sexton is one of the college leaders claiming his university does a sufficient job of regulating labor conditions is worrying in light of the human and worker rights controversies surrounding the building of NYU’s Abu Dhabi campus in 2009, and of the long and ongoing struggles between NYU management and its graduate student employees (see Human Rights Watch 9-13; and Krause, et al.). Further, his interest in protecting the unpaid internship system seems less than disinterested, as NYU recently became a vendor of course credit and summer housing to unpaid interns using the nation’s largest for-profit internship merchant, Dream Careers (see below).

who receives the gift is debatable when even the least skilled students can quickly be trained as productive makers of photocopies and coffee. Drew McLellan of the McLellan Marketing Group explains the obvious benefit for employers: “It’s more money for the bottom line for you” (qtd. in Chura). Echoing him, start-up owner David Hung asks, “Free, talented labor – how can you say no to that?” (qtd. in Lee and McGeehan). But for anyone not controlling a chunk of the means of production, the trouble with unpaid internships is their very definition: rather than being compensated for their labor, interns donate their work to their employers. Assuming 50,000 interns making the federal minimum wage for just twelve weeks in a summer, the lost wages add up to at least \$174 million per year.⁹

II. Mr. Sandman, Sell Me a Dream . . .

The second most common complaint against internships, especially unpaid ones, is the uneven playing field they create for those entering the job market. “They fly in the face of meritocracy,” Anya Kamenetz writes. “[Y]ou must be rich enough to work without pay to get your foot in the door.” The majority of internships are open only to high school, college, or graduate and professional students, and they discriminate even against the average undergraduate, who is 26 and often has family responsibilities that make it difficult to temporarily relocate. Further, 80 percent of undergraduates in America already work 30 hours per week,¹⁰ so a twelve-week hiatus from paid labor or on a stipend that barely covers travel is a significant, if not impossible, sacrifice for many.

As well as diminishing some students’ employability, the internship system can be read as a strategy of class warfare working by exclusion against working-class and

⁹ I came to this figure as an updated version of the one Anya Kamenetz includes in her oft-cited 2006 *New York Times* op-ed, “Take This Internship and Shove It”: \$174 million = 50,000 interns x 12 weeks x 40 hours x \$7.25. Because the initial estimate of the number of internships is probably low and because there are interns working year-round, the result of \$174 million annually is likely an underestimate as well.

¹⁰ Bousquet, “Extreme Work Study.” In *How the University Works*, Marc Bousquet breaks down the statistics on undergraduates’ labor: “In the United States, only 20 percent of undergraduates do not work at all. About 50 percent of all undergraduates work an average of twenty-five hours per week. The remaining 30 percent work full-time, more than full-time, or at multiple jobs approximating the equivalent of full-time, averaging thirty-nine hours a week. This means that about 10 or 12 million undergraduates are in the workforce at any given moment. Indeed, if you’re a U.S. citizen under age twenty-five, you are more likely to be working if you are a student than if you are not” (150).

low-income students in several smaller-scale modes. The most conspicuous is the recent phenomenon of internship merchants. Dream Careers, founded in 2001 as the University of Dreams, is the largest of these. Not a university by any definition, Dream Careers is a for-profit corporation that funnels students into internships and houses them while they work. Potential interns (they go by “dreamers”) first complete an application for the program, which sorts for those likely to be successful in securing an internship. It is unclear what percentage of applicants are screened out, but Chris Duggan, Dream Careers’ president and a former dreamer himself, admits that they would turn away “a student from a community college with a 1.8 GPA who wants to do investment banking at Goldman Sachs” (qtd. in Lipka, “Dream”). Those who make it through choose from a list of fifteen internship locations and begin polishing resumes and being coached on interview skills before applying through Dream Careers to a number of internships. The company has partnerships with over a thousand corporations and nonprofit organizations, and it supplies interns for over 2,000 positions a year, guaranteeing placement to all paying customers. The price depends on the location: eight weeks working for Giorgio Armani in New York City or for Hilton in Barcelona will run you \$7,999; but for the budget-conscious, internships at Kraft or Pfizer in San Jose, Costa Rica, go for \$6,250 (Dream Careers, “Internship”). Travel and any visa fees are not included. What does come with enrollment is housing in rented university dorms, dinner each day, transportation to and from work (by van or subway), evening seminars, weekend events, and one unit of course credit at New York University or Silicon Valley’s Menlo College.

The only thing missing is pay for the forty hours of work these students do each week. Dream Careers warns potential applicants that they might need to do some “fundraising: Many students finance their participation by reaching out to immediate family, extended family and friends to ask for donations to support their summer plans. This form of ‘sponsorship’ has been surprisingly successful for those students who are able to express how truly valuable they feel this experience will be toward their future” (Dream Careers, “FAQ”). While the company does offer a small amount of financial aid for those who qualify, at least a few of their lower-income clients take out loans to complete the program, and the initial sticker shock is sure to dissuade others from applying.

If that's the case, one Dream Careers competitor, Fast Track Internships, offers a significantly cheaper option. Depending on whether they're seeking paid or unpaid internship work, Fast Track charges only \$799 to \$999 to write students' cover letters and resumes for them and to connect students with internship opportunities that are not advertised publicly. Their website states, "In most cases your resume and cover letter will be the only one the employer will review. And it's likely the internship will have been created just for you" (Fast Track). Because most of the internships available through Dream Careers, Fast Track, Internships.com, the Washington Internship Program, and other merchants are not open to applicants who can't afford to use these middlemen, it means that getting a foot in the door at many high-profile employers is impossible for most working-class students.

Rather than seeing themselves as a service for the elite, though, internship-placement companies like Dream Careers and Fast Track imagine themselves playing a leveling role. CEO and founder of Dream Careers, Eric Lochtefeld, told the *Wall Street Journal*, "It's a huge misconception to say this program is for rich kids. . . . The average student comes from the middle class, and their parents dig deep" to come up with the money (qtd. in Shellenbarger). Sara Lipka profiled one such middle-class student in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, but it wasn't his parents who paid: "Fil Choulramountry got a \$1,000 grant from University of Dreams and took out a loan to cover the rest of his \$5,500 bill to intern in Chicago. . . . He interned for an interior designer and paid off his loan by working 30 hours a week for the athletics department back at Adrian [College] during the fall of his senior year" ("Dream"). Pretending for a moment that Fil happens to be interested in banking rather than architecture, it would have been plausible for him to take a loan from JPMorgan Chase to pay to work for free at JPMorgan (a Dream Careers partner) in the summer, leading to a workload during the semester that exceeds the number of hours per week conducive to maintaining good academic performance.¹¹

Another subtle version of pay-to-play in the internship economy has arisen from corporations' need to satisfy the Department of Labor's guidelines for unpaid internships. To insure that the legality of their internship programs won't be questioned, many employers require that students receive academic credit for their internships, but

¹¹ See Kalenkoski and Pabilonia; and Zomer.

employers don't pay for the credit hours. At my alma mater, Bowling Green State University in northwest Ohio, one summer credit hour would cost an in-state student \$404, or \$709 if you're not from buckeye country. Because most internships take place in the summer, it isn't possible to lump this tuition charge into the academic-year bill, which would make it slightly easier to deal with.¹² Further, what students are paying for in the first place is hard to determine, as a University of Montana student points out in their campus newspaper. "The University charges these students for use of UM's buildings, computers and other facilities like the University Center," Trevon Milliard writes, "even though many never set foot in Missoula or even the state." The credit requirement boils down to students paying hundreds of dollars to their universities for the privilege of working elsewhere.

The compulsory expenditures entailed by internships further represent a form of class warfare because they feed the crushing cycle of debt in which too many students are caught. Sixty-seven percent of students graduating from four-year colleges and universities in 2009 had student loan debt averaging \$24,000, up from \$18,650 in 2004 (Project on Student Debt, "Quick"; Project on Student Debt, "Student"). Added to that, a study by lender Sallie Mae found that the average graduating senior carried \$3,173 credit card debt in 2008, of which \$2,200 covered education-related expenses (Sallie Mae). Students are sometimes advised to accrue further debt to cover living expenses while interning, and internship merchants point students to loans as a "funding option" for their services.

The indirect effects of the student debt crisis have yet to fully make themselves known, but we do know that it is likely to worsen economic and educational inequality in the US, and to make that gap harder to close in future. Tamara Draut observes that "nearly three quarters of students at the nation's top 146 colleges come from families in the top quarter of the socioeconomic status (SES) scale" (48), and that Black and Latino students are now less likely to attend college than they were thirty years ago (34). Those lower-income and historically-underrepresented students who do manage to cover sky-high tuition are initiated into what Jeffrey J. Williams calls the "pedagogy of debt" – a

¹² See Yagoda; and and Lipka, "Would You Like Credit with That Internship?"

pecuniary pedagogy teaching that “disparities of wealth are an issue of the individual, rather than society”; and that “you are how much you can make, minus how much you owe” (Williams, “Debt”). In his analysis, students with debt are subjected to a modern form of indentured servitude, pledging the first decades of their working lives in exchange for “transport to a job” (Williams, “Student”). As we know from the recent mortgage and credit crises, debt tends to aggregate once a person begins relying on it. Because interning increases gateway debt, it contributes directly to a cycle that keeps the low-income in their bracket generation-to-generation: if you’re constantly servicing your own debt, how do you save up for your children’s education or your retirement, pay off your mortgage, or leave a nest egg to get the next generation started?

The Social Costs of Student Internships

The unequal distribution of wealth, debt, status, and education promulgated by the internship system is a burden borne not only by students, but by anyone who pays taxes, works, or goes to school in the US, because it functions as a source of near-invisible corporate welfare, socializing the costs of training and paying workers. Not only do interns donate labor to for-profit businesses, but the support required for unpaid and low-wage interns draws from public and charitable funds, and potential payroll taxes are lost. Most directly, the public funds interns who wind up in welfare programs while working. In 2007 the *Christian Science Monitor* ran a story about an editorial intern and her struggle to stay in the black: “To prepare for her internship, [Jeannie] Vanasco spent the summer of 2006 working three jobs. . . . Despite her efforts, rent [in New York City] for the first few months consumed her savings. Not wanting to burden her mother, a librarian making minimum wage, she applied for government assistance” (Peter). Vanasco’s is likely not an isolated case.¹³ The Regional Internship Center of Southwestern Pennsylvania includes an interview on its advice blog explaining the circumstances under which interns may be eligible for food stamps, and encouraging them to apply (Logan).

Institutions of higher education, public and private, have also come up with a number of tactics to defray tuition costs and the cost of living while interning. Some of

¹³ There are no statistics measuring how many interns use welfare programs.

them allow students to register for the required academic credits during the regular semester, and some report sending letters certifying that interns are receiving credit even when they're not or simply recording the internship on a student's transcript.¹⁴ At many universities and nonprofit organizations, grants, fellowships, and stipends are available to students to offset their internship-related expenses. Sewanee: The University of the South reported raising more than \$5 million for its internship fellowship fund, and, thanks to funding from the Wal-Mart Corporation and the Council of Independent Colleges, Kalamazoo College now gives \$3,000 to any first-generation college student who needs help funding an unpaid internship (Lipka, "Dream," "Kalamazoo"). My university, Carnegie Mellon, offers between six and ten summer grants (up to \$3,000 each) for students interning in Washington, DC, in the summer, a program made possible by an endowment fund a university trustee set up. Via the free labor extracted from interns, charitable donations and scarce university resources are eventually deposited into the coffers of employers.

Further, the low or no wages paid to interns bring down wages for all workers, as Jessica Curiale notes, "as unpaid internships become increasingly important and more individuals who can afford to forsake a paycheck agree to work for free, employers have little incentive to pay interns. Indeed, this is exactly why we have wage regulation at all – without it, the wage would constantly be driven down" (105). The Fair Labor Standards Act, the very law that corporations have been skirting for decades with internship programs, was signed to prevent the race to the bottom that results when wages are determined entirely by market forces, especially in a situation like the present, in which the reserve army of labor is swelled by high unemployment among youth and all other workers. Surrounded by a flood of job inquiries from the ever-growing reserve corps of interns willing to work for free, workers are not only subjected to wage deflation, but their job security and ability to bargain collectively are undermined. Who needs scabs when you've got interns?

Unfortunately, the hope for enforcing regulation of the internship market grows slimmer with each cohort of DC interns. "Since Washington internships serve as a

¹⁴ See Lipka; Yagoda; and Wolf.

pipeline that brings policy makers into the nation's capital," Jennifer Lee writes, "some people fear that over the long term, internships will be another means, like the rising costs of college tuition, of squeezing voices from the working class and even the middle class out of high-level policy debates." Making it to a DC internship hardly guarantees a voice, though, because the legal void in which interns exist can leave them "more vulnerable to sexual harassment than students or full-time employees." Headline-catching cases like those of Monica Lewinsky and Chandra Levy open a window onto the "predatory work environment" within which young, female government interns get their first look at the real world of Washington (Yamada 3). As long as internships continue to multiply without regulatory or legislative oversight, they will continue to limit the number of entry-level positions available to those who require compensation for employment or "can't handle" harassment, promoting and intensifying class and gender inequality in the U.S.

The Privilege to Work

The rhetoric of internships is one of opportunity, experience, and investment. It presents the ability to work not as a right, but as a privilege and a reward. "Congratulations," it says to the successful applicant, "You have been chosen." Internship websites and advice books emphasize the value of experience over the hardships interns might encounter. *The Vault Guide to Top Internships*, for example, reassures prospective interns that they'll have "more freedom than a regular full-time employee" (2). "Take experience over money," they recommend, "You can always earn money; however, the window of opportunity for internships isn't open eternally. If you're really broke, consider taking a part-time job in order to work at the internship you really want" (1). The student author of *Scoring a Great Internship* reminds readers, "An internship is not a job. . . . You've agreed to barter your time in exchange for experience" (3). By endorsing an understanding of unpaid labor as an investment strategy, the rhetoric of internships also reinforces a conception of "education as risk management," to borrow Marc Bousquet's phrase.¹⁵ In this schema, labor performed for a corporation or the government during an internship is not seen as a donation, but as a

¹⁵ See his "Take Your Ritalin and Shut Up."

hedge against the uncertainties of the post-college job market. Rather than teaching young workers to fight for fair conditions of labor, this system encourages them to internalize an ethic of donation: the privilege of working is earned only by continuously donating uncompensated hours to one's employer.

Part and parcel of an educational era defined by standardized testing, student debt, distance learning, vocationalized curricula, and No Child Left Behind, internships and their rhetoric contribute to producing young workers with subjectivities molded to the labor needs of twenty-first century capitalism, rather than in the interest of the students, of fellow workers, or of society at large. The educational system has always implicitly prepared students for the social and psychological realities of the factory, the cubicle, or the conference room. But since the advent of post-Fordism in the U.S. and its escalating instability and tendency to crisis in the hands of neoliberals, what's been required is a new kind of worker, one who thrives in casualized, informal, and precarious labor conditions. Andrew Ross describes this flexible worker in "The Mental Labor Problem":

Someone who is comfortable in an ever-changing environment that often demands creative shifts in communication with different kinds of employers, clients, and colleagues; who is attitudinally geared toward work that requires long, often unsocial, hours; who dedicates their time and energy to distinct projects, rather than to a steady flow of production; who exercises self-management, if not self-employment, in the execution of their work; and who is accustomed to a contingent and casual work environment, without overt supervision or judgment from above. (206)

Internships help to produce these workers because they model and normalize the new paradigm of work: short-term, on-demand, lacking tangible benefits, and emphasizing self-disciplined, self-directed initiative over obedience.

Internship rhetoric also anticipates corporations' desire for workers who take as their ethos something akin to the "itinerant professionalism" Stephen R. Barley and Gideon Kunda described among tech contractors in the late nineties. "Itinerant experts," Barley and Kunda found, exhibit a changed relationship to work, in which they view themselves as commodities rather than human resources and see "work itself [become] a

credentialing process” (289, 299). The tech contractors “were distinguished . . . from technical workers who preferred permanent employment” by their “willingness to assume full responsibility for accumulating and managing their human capital” (288). The rhetoric of internships indicates that this willingness (and its attendant risk) should be adopted by all future professional-managerial and high-wage workers as a prerequisite to joining something like what Richard Florida terms the “creative class”: a casually-dressed, tolerant, well-to-do, and diverse technocracy, who make their own schedules on their smartphones from the comfort of energy-efficient, post-class society highrises. While only a minority of all workers, at most 30 percent, actually meet his definition of this class, the rhetoric of internships hails all students as potential beneficiaries of a freer, more flexible working life (Florida 8). Despite Florida’s optimism that the creative ranks will swell, this leaves the other 70 percent with an internalized, imaginary comfort with inconvenient and precarious work patterns, even if they won’t ever reach a commensurate level of compensation.

For individual workers in our “knowledge economy,” this is the tragedy. But what’s at stake for all of us in the continuation and growth of the internship economy is the making of a generation of workers who see precarious employment as the norm or even as a smarter arrangement than the outdated long-term job with benefits. As long as they view job security and fair compensation not as rights, but as rewards for a privileged few, these young workers seem unlikely to struggle against inequality and unfair or exploitative labor conditions.

Works Cited

- “Anthony, John.” Comment after “Unpaid Internships? No Such Thing.” *Businessweek Debate Room*. 20 May 2008. Web. <<http://www.businessweek.com/debateroom>>. 18 Dec. 2009.
- Aoun, Joseph E., et al. Letter to Hilda L. Solis. 28 April 2010. Web. 30 April 2010.
- . “Protect Unpaid Internships.” *Inside Higher Ed* 13 July 2010. *Insidehighered.com*. Web. 13 July 2010.
- Barley, Stephen R., and Gideon Kunda. *Gurus, Hired Guns, and Warm Bodies: Itinerant Experts in a Knowledge Economy*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004.
- Bousquet, Marc. “Extreme Work-Study 1.” *Brainstorm (Chronicle of Higher Education blog)* 4 June 2008. Web. 9 Dec. 2009. <<http://www.chronicle.com/blogPost/extreme-work-study-1/5998>>.
- . *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*. New York: NYU P, 2008.
- . “Take Your Ritalin and Shut Up.” *Works and Days* 51/52, 53/54. 26-27 (2008-09): 438-57.
- Bowen, Rachel. “The Eternal Intern? No Thanks.” *Guardian.co.uk*. 6 Aug. 2009. Web. 15 Sept. 2009.
- Chura, Hillary. “Hiring Is Rising in One Area: Low-Paid Interns.” *New York Times* 28 Nov. 2009. *NYTimes.com*. Web. 7 Dec. 2009.
- Collegiate Employment Research Institute. “CERI Thought Piece: Internships as High Stakes Events.” 1 Jan. 2011. Web. 9 April 2011. <<http://www.ceri.msu.edu>>.
- Cullen, Lisa Takeuchi. “The New World of Internships.” *Time* 21 Sept. 2006. *Time.com*. Web. 15 Sept. 2009.
- Curiale, Jessica. “America’s New Glass Ceiling: Unpaid Internships, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and the Urgent Need for Change.” *Hastings Law Journal* 61.101 (July 2010). *Social Science Research Network*. Web. 9 February 2011. <<http://www.papers.ssrn.com>>.
- Draut, Tamara. *Strapped: Why America’s 20- and 30-Somethings Can’t Get Ahead*. New York: Doubleday, 2005.

- Dream Careers, Inc. "FAQ." Web. 12 April 2011. <<http://www.summerinternships.com>>.
- . "Internship Program Dates and Deadlines." Web. 12 April 2011.
- Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. 29 USC. Sec. 201. Web. 29 March 2011.
- Farnsworth, Amy. "Rise of the 40-Something Intern." *Christian Science Monitor* 26 June 2009. *CSMonitor.com*. Web. 3 Feb. 2011.
- Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class, And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.
- Gamerman, Ellen. "Internships for Sale." *Wall Street Journal* 10 June 2006. *WSJ.com*. Web. 10 March 2009.
- Gregory, David L. "The Problematic Employment Dynamics of Student Internships." *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics and Public Policy* 12 (1998). *LexisNexis*. Web. 9 February 2011.
- Human Rights Watch. "*The Island of Happiness*": *Exploitation of Migrant Workers on Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2009.
- "jesor." Comment after "U.S. Labor Department Releases New Rules for 'Educational' Internships" by Sara Lipka. *Chronicle of Higher Education* 21 April 2010. *Chronicle.com*. Web. 22 April 2010.
- Kalenkoski, Charlene Marie, and Sabrina Wulff Pabilonia. "Parental Transfers, Student Achievement, and the Labor Supply of College Students." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Working Paper 416 (March 2008). <<http://www.bls.gov/osmr/abstract/ec/ec080020.htm>>.
- Kamenetz, Anya. "Take This Internship and Shove It." *New York Times* 30 May 2006. *NYTimes.com*. Web. 15 March 2009.
- "Kate." Comment after "Unpaid Internships? No Such Thing." *Businessweek Debate Room*. 14 May 2008. Web. <<http://www.businessweek.com/debateroom>>. 18 Dec. 2009.
- Kerry, John F. Letter to Hilda L. Solis. 11 May 2010. Web. 15 May 2010.
- Krause, Monica, Mary Nolan, Michael Palm, and Andrew Ross. *The University Against Itself: The NYU Strike and the Future of the Academic Workplace*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2008.

- Lee, Jennifer 8. "Crucial Unpaid Internships Increasingly Separate the Haves from the Have-Nots." *New York Times* 10 Aug. 2004. *NYTimes.com*. Web. 15 March 2009.
- Lee, Jennifer 8., and Patrick McGeehan. "From Wall Street Jobs to Unpaid Internships." *City Room* 16 April 2009. *NYTimes.com*. Web. 1 Dec. 2009. <<http://www.cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com>>.
- Lipka, Sara. "Dream Internships and Dubious Academic Credit for Sale: \$9,500." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 18 July 2008. *Chronicle.com*. Web. 15 March 2009.
- . "At Kalamazoo College, Money for Internships and Preparation, Too." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 14 Feb. 2010. *Chronicle.com*. Web. 16 Feb. 2010.
- . "Would You Like Credit with That Internship?" *Chronicle of Higher Education* 9 May 2010. *Chronicle.com*. Web. 12 May 2010.
- Logan, Maureen. "Surviving Unpaid Internships Part 2: Hungry? Don't Starve!" *RIC Blog* 3 Dec. 2009. Regional Internship Center of Southwestern Pennsylvania. Web. 7 Dec. 2009. <<http://www.thericblog.org>>.
- Malveaux, Julianne. "Unpaid Internships Deny Poorer Kids." *USA Today* 13 July 2007. *USAToday.com*. Web. 15 March 2009.
- Milliard, Trevon. "Off-Campus Interns Shouldn't Have to Pay On-Campus Fees." *Montana Kaimin* 28 Aug. 2008. *Montanakaiman.com*. Web. 9 Dec. 2008.
- Mizgorski, Ray. "Re: Questions about Internships." Message to the author. 9 Dec. 2009. Email.
- National Association of Colleges and Employers. "Research Brief: 2009 Experiential Education Survey." Bethlehem, PA: National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2009.
- . "Research Brief: 2010 Internship and Co-op Survey." Bethlehem, PA: National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2010.
- Perlin, Ross. "Unpaid Interns, Complicit Colleges." *New York Times* 2 April 2011. *NYTimes.com*. Web. 4 April 2011.

- Project on Student Debt. "Quick Facts about Student Debt." Berkeley: Institute for College Access and Success, 2010. Web. 4 April 2011. <<http://www.projectonstudentdebt.org>>.
- . "Student Debt and the Class of 2009." Berkeley: Institute for College Access and Success, 2010.
- Rosen, Rebecca, Samer Hamadeh, Mark Oldman, and the Staff of Vault. *The Vault Guide to Top Internships*. Updated 2008 Ed. New York: Vault, 2007.
- Ross, Andrew. "The Mental Labor Problem." *Low Pay, High Profile: The Global Push for Fair Labor*. New York: New Press, 2004. 191-254.
- Rubinstein, Ellen. *Scoring a Great Internship*. Students Helping Students. New York: Natavi Guides, 2002.
- Sallie Mae, Inc. "Study Finds Rising Number of College Students Using Credit Cards for Tuition." *Salliemae.com* 13 April 2009. Web. 10 Dec. 2009.
- Shellenbarger, Sue. "Do You Want an Internship? It'll Cost You." *Wall Street Journal* 28 Jan. 2009. *WSJ.com*. Web. 25 March 2009.
- Shih, Gary. "Unpaid Work, but They Pay for the Privilege." *New York Times* 9 Aug. 2009. *NYTimes.com*. Web. 15 Sept. 2009.
- Smith, Sonia. "Biting the Hand that Doesn't Feed Me." *Slate* 8 June 2006. Web. 15 Sept. 2009.
- "Terry from Rochester." Comment after "Unpaid Internships? No Such Thing." *Businessweek Debate Room*. 20 May 2008. Web. 18 Dec. 2009. <<http://www.businessweek.com/debateroom>>.
- United States Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division. "Fact Sheet #71: Internship Programs under the Fair Labor Standards Act." April 2010. Web. 29 March 2011. <<http://www.wagehour.dol.gov>>.
- Williams, Jeffrey J. "Debt Education: Bad for the Young, Bad for America." *Dissent* (Summer 2006). Web. 10 Dec. 2009. <<http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=657>>.
- . "The Pedagogy of Debt." *College Literature* 33.4 (2006): 155-69.
- . "Student Debt and the Spirit of Indenture." *Dissent* (Fall 2008). Web. 18 Dec. 2009. <<http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=1303>>.

- Wise, Carolyn C., Samer Hamadeh, Mark Oldman, and the Staff of Vault. *The Vault Guide to Top Internships: 2009 Edition*. New York: Vault, Inc., 2008.
- Wolf, Frank. Letter. *Chronicle of Higher Education* 11 April 2008. *Chronicle.com*. Web. 10 March 2009.
- Yagoda, Ben. "Will Work for Academic Credit." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 21 March 2008. *Chronicle.com*. Web. 10 March 2009.
- Yamada, David C. "The Employment Rights of Student Interns." *Connecticut Law Review* 35 (Fall 2002). *LexisNexis*. Web. 9 February 2011.
- Zomer, Saffron. "Working Too Hard to Make the Grade: How Fewer Work Hours and More Financial Aid Can Help California Community College Students Succeed." San Francisco, CA: California Public Interest Research Group, 2009.