



**Targeting the Right Colleges
for Internship Recruiting**

Heather Krasna - Founder of www.internshipgenius.com

TARGETING THE RIGHT COLLEGES FOR INTERNSHIP RECRUITING

It's something that probably happens at least a couple times a week at every college career center in the country—an employer emails or faxes or posts a job or internship listing for a type of student we don't have. For example, at the college where I worked in New York City for seven years, 85% of the students are business majors, and the school offers no degrees in engineering, nursing, architecture, fashion design, social work, medicine, or law; yet, we would receive postings on a regular basis for students with degrees in these majors and many others we didn't offer. If we were in a good mood and had a free instant, we would try to refer the employer to colleges we knew of that might actually offer these majors. But it was a time-consuming endeavor, and typically wasted both our time and that of the employer.

WHY TARGET?

On the most basic level, at least investigating what majors are offered by a college is the beginning of an important part of college recruiting—targeting the correct college. Just as a career counselor advises students not to take a scattershot approach to applying for jobs or internships, and to avoid blasting a generic cover letter and résumé to every company on earth, we also know that there are benefits to building a stronger relationship with specific colleges that offer students with the majors, demographics, geographic preferences, and other qualities you seek in candidates.

Targeting the right colleges can reduce the expenses of college recruiting efforts by focusing recruiters' time, travel budgets, job fair registration fees, etc. to those schools where you are most likely to succeed in finding talent that fits your needs. Also, other employers meticulously target; if you don't target you may be on the losing side in the impending "war for talent" as the Baby Boomer generation begins to retire. (This is not to say an employer should ignore applications from students from schools that aren't on their target school list. Creating a logical list of target schools, however, can still be a good investment of time and energy.)

Of course, in the age of mass job postings and online application processes, it doesn't cost that much more to post a job at hundreds of schools. But beyond a quick broadcasting of an internship listing, where do you really want to expend

your effort? In an age where doing everything online makes the job application process more impersonal, how can you win the war for talent by building a more personal relationship with a specific college, or even specific students?

HOW TO TARGET

A first step in the process of choosing target schools is to determine your company's hiring needs and to project where they will be in the next few years. It's important to remember, for example, that students usually make a decision about a choice of their college major in their sophomore year. Employers might be able to influence a student's choice of major by providing presentations on campus about careers in that field. However, an employer will not reap the benefits of this type of "seeding" for at least two more years, when the student finally graduates and enters the workforce.

So, thinking ahead at least a few years, look around your organization. Are certain parts of your workforce nearing retirement in the next years? Where are your greatest needs for entry-level and management track hires? What skills or qualities are important to you in new hires? Are there particular majors that are most essential? Do you foresee changes in your organization's business model, product line, or structure that will influence your college recruiting? Does your company have a commitment to hiring and retaining a diverse workforce?

A good way to determine hiring needs is to survey hiring managers in the organization, asking for specifics about skills, degrees, and demographics they seek in their hires. Of course, integrating this information into your organization's long-term or strategic plan, with input from the highest levels of leadership in the organization, will help you make an informed decision about what kinds of candidates you seek.

WHERE TO LOOK

Now that you have a sense of how many candidates, and from what backgrounds, are needed in your organization, you can begin the search for schools that offer a population you're seeking. It is very tempting, and sometimes logical, to look to the past for previous successes you may have had. Surveying

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your current staff to see where they went to college it is one place to start. It may also be helpful to look at the success of prior college hires from certain schools—do graduates of certain schools get promoted more quickly than others?

However, there can be pitfalls in relying entirely on this data. For example, demographics, majors, and even the curriculum can change dramatically within a college or university. Additionally, there may be excellent opportunities at colleges where your staff did not go to college. In some cases, these colleges may not be receiving attention from competitor firms, and, therefore, can provide an excellent opportunity to gather the “cream of the crop” of the graduating class.

In addition to looking for those colleges that have many alumni among your current staff, it is important to consider not only which majors are offered at the college, but how many students actually choose those specific majors, and what actual courses are required for those majors. Most college career centers will be able to help you if you call to ask them this kind of question, and can at least provide some anecdotal information about what the most popular majors are at the college. Or, they may be able to refer you to an office of institutional research at the college that can provide you with detailed demographic information. This type of information can also be quite helpful when assessing a college for the diversity of the students.

College rankings can sometimes be helpful, though it is also important to remember that the top candidates from a lower-ranked, possibly regional college may be just as competitive as many of the students from a high ranked college (and again, students from the high ranked college may be courted by numerous other competitor companies, whereas a regional college might get overlooked). Also, not all college rankings are based on criteria that are helpful when it comes to hiring. It might be worth looking at things besides the U.S. News & World Report rankings (such as whether a school is AACSB-accredited, if you are seeking business majors.)

Geographic information is also important. There are some colleges which naturally have a population of students who

are willing to relocate. A good question to ask the college career center representative is “where do students come from to attend your college?” If students from all over the nation, or perhaps all over the world, attend that college or university, there is a chance that those students may be flexible about relocating to your organization’s location. It is also helpful to know whether most students who graduate from that university tend to stay in the surrounding area, or whether they prefer to relocate elsewhere. It is important to remain open-minded, though; if a college has all of the other qualities you seek, it is quite possible to maintain an excellent “long-distance” relationship with that college and still show excellent hiring results if you put in the effort. An example of this took place at my previous college based in New York City; a Chicago-based pharmaceutical firm has been successfully recruiting students to relocate to Chicago from New York City for many years.

Other criteria might include the potential to build other types of partnerships with a college or university, such as the ability to support their research programs provide corporate contributions that will have a larger impact both on the university and your company.

Once you’ve determined which criteria are most important to you, it is helpful to rank these criteria in order of importance. Perhaps it is helpful to give each criterion a numerical weight, which you can use later to make ranking decisions. The next step is to produce some research and analysis to determine how the various schools on your list have ranked according to your various criteria. Balancing your list with the number of schools you can feasibly recruit at within your recruiting budget and remembering the non-quantifiable factors (like where your CEO went to school!) is also important.

BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP ONCE YOU’VE CHOSEN

Once you’ve determined your top schools, it is important to consistently build a relationship with them. Sometimes it can take a couple of years of consistent effort to institutionalize a relationship with a college or university. It is important to remember that students are constantly cycling through the university, and the ones you may have tried very hard

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to impress will soon be graduating. To be consistent in your campus presence is essential to building a target school relationship.

Start your relationship with a phone call to the college career center's director or head of employer relations. Try to have an in-person meeting with them, if possible. It doesn't hurt to bring the college career center staff to your company office to give them a sense of what you do. Try to provide information in a way that a layperson can understand. Many college career centers' staffs have not worked in the corporate world, and may not understand the lingo of your industry, yet they may still be responsible for explaining to numerous college students what it is that you do.

This might sound basic, but try to be friendly and polite with the college career center representatives! They may sometimes have an influence over whether a student chooses to work for you, so making a good impression with them can only help your organization. Also, try to be realistic in what the career center can do for you. Some career centers are seriously understaffed compared to others, and most of them are not in the "placement" business. They don't function as headhunters, they don't make a commission, and they cannot just send you resumes in an instant, nor can they typically provide recommendations for specific candidates. Most career center staffs aren't doing this work for the money; they're doing it because it's a rewarding job. So try to appreciate their efforts on your behalf. At the minimum, tell the career center who you hired. At the end of the day, that is how career centers are assessed—by where the students got internships and jobs—and they might depend on you to report this information to them.

It is also important to understand that every college and university is completely different. Many of them have specific policies and procedures especially related to internships, and it is important to learn as much as you can about what they expect from your organization. Colleges may also have a specific internship recruiting time frame often corresponding with the academic calendar (which also varies tremendously between colleges!). Additionally, different colleges have different relationships with student organizations on campus,

or with college professors, and may use different procedures for posting internship positions, organizing on campus presentations, or setting up on campus interviews. Simply ask what the school's calendar year and school policies are as they relate to internship and job recruiting. And please do try to abide by the college's policies—they are all there for a reason.

After an initial meeting, the simplest way to begin the relationship is to post an internship with the school. Follow up and communicate with the career center staff to ensure that the position will get enough publicity. If you are sure that you want to build a long-term relationship, consider signing up for a job fair, corporate presentation, or campus interview schedule.

As the recruiting season winds up, it is important to reassess how your internship hiring is going, how many interns convert to full-time hires, and whether your full-time recruiting has been successful. If the recruiting wasn't successful, try to survey the career center staff and even the students to see if you might be able to improve the efforts on your side before giving up on the school. If the relationship with the school is going well, consider what it involves to become an "employer of choice" on campus; possibilities for going above and beyond the typical employer might include sponsoring scholarships, speaking on campus, volunteering for interview preparation events, volunteering for advisory boards, getting a student who was previously an intern to be your on-campus recruiting ambassador, and so on. If all goes well, you will have made an excellent choice of targets schools, and will begin to see excellent returns on your investment of time, energy, and research—and you will be achieving all your target goals.

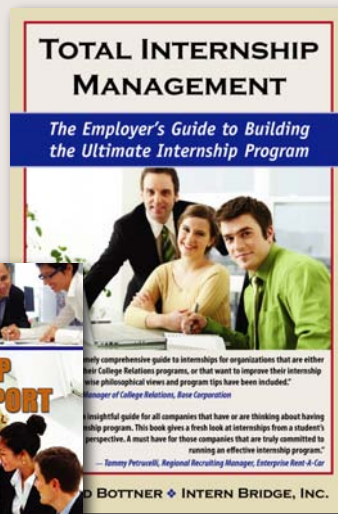
Heather Krasna is the Director of Career Services at a large university on the west coast. Prior to taking on this role, she was the Assistant Director and Internship Coordinator at the Starr Career Development Center at Baruch College (City University of New York) for nearly seven years, and previously served in a similar internship related role at Brooklyn College. She has almost ten years of experience in higher education career services, including all aspects of internship coordination, employer relations, large scale event planning and management, career coaching, workshop design, resume writing and interview preparation. She has an MS in Nonprofit Management from the New School, a Certificate in Adult Career Planning & Development from NYU, and a Certificate in Organizational Development from the New School, and is a provisionally certified Dale Carnegie Human Relations Course trainer. She is the creator of "Crafting an Excellent Internship Program" workshop for employers, and is also the Founder of InternshipGenius.com, an internship consulting practice for students and employers.

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