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Prerequisite to a Career: Experiencing Careers through an Internship

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Prerequisite to a Career: Experiencing Careers through an Internship

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Keith Solvang ’11 interned at the cardiology unit of Highland Park Hospital during the fall of 2009. He was able to help transport patients, prep patients, and observe multiple interventional procedures.

When treating a patient who has just suffered a heart attack, a doctor must have the confidence to find the clot and open the artery within minutes in order to save the patient’s life. Confidence is one of the most important attributes for a student to have, especially when it comes to choosing a post-graduation profession or graduate school. Here at Lake Forest College, one way students can gain this confidence is by experiencing different fields of study through internships. I believe that this is a perfect opportunity for undergraduates to get their feet wet and get a good sense of what may be their professional occupation.

Over the past few years, Lake Forest College biology students’ participation in internships has increased dramatically. Just two years ago, an average of only one student was working at an internship per semester. Lately, this number has increased to 12-14 students per semester. The change occurred when Professor Lynn Westley took over as internship coordinator for the biology department four years ago. She feels that it is a mixture between the availability of internships and students wanting experience for their anticipated career. Professor Westley noted that “internships have become more common everywhere, because more students know they have this opportunity.” Prior to Professor Westley, students had to try and find internships by themselves, which is very difficult without help and knowledge of how to approach a company about an internship opportunity. Since Professor Westley has become the middle woman, she has allowed students to voice their ambition for an internship, and Professor Westley has the ability to communicate effectively with companies offering internships.

Not only are students participating in the internships more often, but the types of internships that are applied for have changed as well. Students go into a variety of internships ranging from research and medicine to working at the coroner’s office. These internships have also helped some students with their senior theses. Professor Westley said that ever since Rosalind Franklin has teamed up with Lake Forest College many students are participating in more research, and this is the first time that Rosalind Franklin professors are becoming thesis advisors for students. Several students are now using research through Rosalind Franklin for their thesis work. One student in particular is Daryn Cass who is currently conducting research for her senior thesis on cocaine addiction in rats. The program is nice for students who are not particularly interested in research on campus. They can now go off-campus and find the type of research that interests them.

Last semester I participated in an internship at Highland Park hospital in the cardiology department. I had no problem securing this internship due to the collaboration with Professor Westley. Since I am pre-med and interested in cardiology, this was a great opportunity for me. Not only was I able to see what the doctors do but also get experience helping with paper work, seeing what the technology specialists do, and was able to familiarize myself with the hard work of the nurses. I went to my internship three times a week and not one day was the same. On some days, I was able to help prepare patients, which allowed me to connect with the patient. One of the most interesting cases I saw was a 32 year-old female. She was brought in to have a pacemaker put in to help her heart beat regularly. She was diagnosed with a disease called dysautonomia. This disease affects her automatic nervous system and does not allow her to effectively breathe, blink, or even have a regular heartbeat. The pacemaker was supposed to help her, but the doctor said that it would only increase her quality of life by about 5%. I helped prepare that patient and got to talk to her before the operation. She asked me if everything was going to be alright. I told her that the doctor was the best and that she would be okay. Three hours later, after unsuccessfully placing the pacemaker in her chest, she coded, and I saw her get brought back to life. This is an experience that no one else would have unless given the internship opportunity. I may have seen the hard part of medicine that day, but I saw the passion and the confidence it takes to be an effective physician and to truly help someone who is in need. Sadly, with interning at a hospital, I did see terrible disease and even death. This may seem like a negative, but it does give a student insight into what it takes to be a physician.

I was also able to help transfer patients from the catherization lab to their rooms, allowing me to see if the procedure helped them. On other days, I was able to sit down with the doctors and talk about the procedure at hand, medical school, residencies, and medicine in general. But even beyond these, I was only able to answer phones and do paperwork. This internship permitted me to see that it takes a whole cast of people to treat a patient, not just the physician.

I enjoyed my internship because it gave me an overall understanding of the medical field, and I was able to interact with physicians and the other medical professionals who sometimes get overlooked. I feel that regardless of one’s profession, may it be graduate school and research, medicine, or something else, an internship is a great way to get experience and make sure that you are doing what you want to do for the rest of your life. Participating in an internship for a whole semester will give one a better understanding of both the positives and negatives that come with any type of job that a student may wish to pursue.

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