

A YOUNG PROFESSIONAL'S PARADISE

HOUSTON'S NATIONALLY COMPETITIVE COMPANIES OFFER STUDENTS PRICELESS HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

BY JENAE SITZES

With several community colleges, four state universities, and five private universities, as well as three law schools and numerous health institutions, Houston has a lot of young people walking its streets. And whether they're studying bio-engineering at Rice University, hotel and restaurant management at the University of Houston, or marketing at Texas Southern University, all aspiring professionals have one thing in common: a need for real-world experience.

Lauren Jordan, a senior at Texas A&M Galveston majoring in maritime administration and economics, landed an internship last summer with Equipment Management Services, LLC, a shipping container depot and sales company based in Houston. EMS deliberately sought to hire a female intern for its inaugural internship program, "because women don't traditionally consider this field, and need to know these opportunities exist," said Kevin J. Smith, Jr., EMS Vice President. While attending classes, Jordan continues to work one day a week at EMS where she receives real-world exposure to applications of her field of study.

Most undergraduate students are limited to brief internships, but in Houston there are plenty of unique opportunities for young people to get their feet wet no matter what field

they plan to enter. Here's a close look at two career-boosting programs for students, a small sampling of the many available in the greater Houston area.

EXPLORING HOUSTON'S ENERGY

Beginning early in 2016, Mexican students will have the chance to participate in the ultimate cultural immersion and career development experience by interning at companies in the Energy Capital of the World.

The Greater Houston Partnership is working with the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City and the U.S. Department of State to make the internship program, which will place Mexican undergraduate students at Houston-based companies in the energy sector, a reality.

"It's in an early stage, but it's looking very positive," said Horacio Licon, Vice President of International Investment and Trade at the Greater Houston Partnership. "We're seeing full involvement from the U.S. Embassy, the U.S. Department of State, interest from Houston-based companies, and the universities are enthusiastic about it."

The program has grown out of an effort to get more Mexican students J-1 visas, which allow them to enter the United

States for on-the-job training. In the past, most J-1 visas have been issued for students to work in the hospitality sector, Licon said. As far as the embassy knows, none have been issued for the energy field, so the Mexico-Houston internship program will be the first of its kind.

In Houston, companies approved to sponsor foreign students with J-1 visas include ExxonMobil and Aramco.

Students participating in the internship will be responsible for purchasing their visas as well as paying for housing in Houston. Licon said students will most likely receive a stipend to cover basic living expenses during their internship.

Stephanie Syptak-Ramnath, minister counselor for public affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, emphasized the role Texas plays in the U.S. partnership with Mexico, with 44 percent of Mexican exchange students in the United States living in Texas. Houston's Lone Star College and Houston Community College systems are two of the top three receiving institutions for Mexican undergraduate students in the country.

"These exchange students return to Mexico with a better understanding of the United States, a strong mastery of the English language, and lasting friendships that permanently tie them in a positive manner to Houston and the rest of the country," Syptak-Ramnath said.

"As Mexico opens up its energy market, Houston is an important partner in sharing its experiences in linking industry and academia to respond to the energy sector's workforce needs."

DEVELOPING DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

At the University of Houston, programming apps and security testing aren't things students look forward to doing in future careers—they're already honing these skills and more in an Honors College program called Data Analytics in Student Hands, or DASH, which offers paid positions to students interested in learning programming skills.

"The idea is to involve students in doing data analysis and computer science projects with nonprofits," said Dan Price, an Honors College research assistant professor who helped found the program two years ago.

About 10 students have paid positions with DASH working on innovative programming projects, many of them centering on environmental health, for nonprofit organizations on campus and across the city.

Computer information systems senior Carl Stephen, who has been involved with DASH since his freshman year, said the experience has been invaluable.

"Encountering obstacles and solving them in a real environment versus a theoretical situation in the classroom, that's really beneficial to a future career," Stephen said.

The young program has proven itself successful, and it's already expanding. Under the mentorship of Price and computer science professor Peggy Linder, students can also participate in a full-time summer research program called Summer of Apps. It's exactly what it sounds like—throughout the summer, students work in development teams to create mobile apps that serve a variety of purposes. Completed apps so far have included a plant selection app for gardeners,

a "Healthy Homes" app to monitor indoor air pollution for people with asthma, and a farmers' market app to help Houstonians explore the city's farmers' markets and vendors.

"Several people who were seniors then found jobs because of having done Summer of Apps," Price said.

DASH students were given their greatest opportunity yet when multinational professional services firm PricewaterhouseCoopers reached out to the Honors College about ways it could get involved with students through its Houston office, home to state-of-the-art cybersecurity facilities. Together with the Honors College and DASH, PwC hosted a full-day "hackathon" event for students in April where they learned more about cybersecurity operations at PwC and were challenged to try a bit of server hacking on their own.

"Cybersecurity was one of those things where I thought it was really cool, but I was really involved in the programming sphere, especially with DASH," Stephen said. "I was writing programs; I just wasn't involved in security. The PwC event was a really cool opportunity that came up that helped me use my knowledge and apply it."



PwC hosted a full-day "hackathon" for DASH students.



DASH students working on cybersecurity.



Intern Lauren Jordan with EMS principals.

After the event, Stephen got even luckier—he was offered a summer internship at PwC's Houston office, where he was able to learn even more about cybersecurity in its real-world applications. And when he graduates next August, he said, he's got a good chance of securing a job with PwC.

Price said the opportunities that Stephen and other students have received are unique to Houston, a city whose job growth has been outpacing the nation's other major metro areas for the past four and a half years, according to *Forbes*.

"Houston has the business center that makes it possible," said Price. "There are only a few other cities in the world that could offer you the same opportunity." ²⁰/₁₅