

Internship Reflections
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I'll never forget my first internship. I worked in the DC/Baltimore Area as a landscaper after my freshman year at West Virginia University. I learned a great deal about plants, got in great shape, worked an average of 50 hours per week, and earned enough money for rent and meals for my sophomore year. Unfortunately it was an intense, exhausting (sometimes back-breaking), inhospitable experience that only paid minimum wage. That is why I have a career in floriculture. During my junior and senior summers I had a rewarding experience at a 2-acre greenhouse range in Southern Maryland. I earned \$8.50 an hour and worked an average of 45 hours per week. The instruction and guidance from the owner and head grower were outstanding.

Based on those fruitful internship experiences I can tell you that the purpose of practical work experience through a university program is not simply to get paid and receive credit. More importantly students develop skills, receive compensation and advisement from growers and professors, and really earn their grade. Most of all the experience is a time for students to apply their book knowledge and receive real-world experience.

As a junior faculty member at the University of Florida, I heard similar stories from students who have participated in internships. The most common statement made by students was that the experience "really opened their eyes to the industry." For some it established direction, but for others it alerted them of what they didn't want to do with their education. Either way internships are a good thing. Ultimately, they help shape a student's career path.

Now as an industry professional I am still actively involved with internships. Conrad Fafard offers an internship for 6 months to graduates of horticulture programs that wish to conduct hands-on greenhouse and nursery activities.