The Benefits of Remote Work for Students

BY JEFFREY MOSS, NACE* – MARCH 16, 2020

The continued threat of the coronavirus (COVID-19) has many companies embracing remote work, including opening online opportunities up to college students.

As more companies embrace flexible working arrangements, virtual internships offer a new way to attract and engage college students. So why are remote projects beneficial for students and your company?

Remote work opportunities for college students allow companies to recruit top talent regardless of geographic region, promote a work-life balance that students are accustomed to with online and blended learning, and cultivate a more diverse employee base.

How to Use Remote Work to Attract Top Talent for Your Company

While companies are on the hunt for the next wave of top talent, recent or soon-to-be grads are searching for professional opportunities that fit into their jam-packed schedules. Put yourself in the shoes of a college student beginning their internship search:

> *After submitting your midterm through the online course portal, you log in to attend a virtual info session with a local tech firm. During the session you learn more about a career in digital marketing and that the company is looking for students to be onsite while they work independently to perform a competitor social media analysis. You'd love the experience, but the commute will take you more time over the course of two weeks than the actual project. Do you feel like this company values your time?*

Successful recruiting initiatives should model the types of individuals you want to attract. Many college students are hungry for work experience and they are highly motivated to demonstrate their skills through short-term opportunities. Remember that many students balance extracurricular activities, part-time jobs, athletics, and even family responsibilities with full course loads. They are used to working efficiently, they are ambitious, and they are tech-savvy. By encouraging college students to work with your team virtually while still in school, you're more likely to gain them as a full-time employee once they graduate.

Online Projects Help Attract Self-Starters

Virtual work experience attracts employees who take initiative, have aspirational career goals, and don't need a lot of oversight. Moreover, online projects allow early-career talent to hone their communication skills and master time management. In fact, studies have shown that remote work can boost productivity by allowing team members to work more efficiently.

> *"Working remotely allowed me to improve my communication skills. I had to learn to communicate more than I normally would if I was working in person. This helped me determine what was important to say and to be very clear and direct in what I needed." – A student working a micro-internship*

Virtual Work May Boost Productivity

College students are used to performing a constant balancing act, scrambling from classes to part-time jobs to extracurricular activities. And they bring this same hustle mindset to the workplace. Virtual employees report it is easier to concentrate on projects and in addition:

- They don't need to commute into work.
- They can finish their work on their own time.
- They aren't distracted by their co-workers.
- They can take breaks when they need to.
- Their schedule is more flexible.
- They are self-motivated.

Remote Internships Boost Diversity and Expand Talent Pools

By offering virtual internships, you can recruit, interview, and hire interns from across the United States—not just those within driving distance. Students at any college or university—including those who don't have the same opportunities to connect with name-brand firms in the large metro areas—have the same access to these types of projects.

In addition to expanding geographic reach through remote opportunities, online projects can alleviate travel and time constraints, two major barriers for low-income students for participation in traditional internships. Specifically, remote project-based work attracts students from diverse backgrounds because of the built-in flexibility of when and where the assignment must be completed. With most students working to complete projects on nights and weekends to meet the project deadline, they gain real-work experience without putting other responsibilities on-hold.

How to Ensure Success with Remote Interns

Before hosting a remote college student, you may be worried, "Will they get their work done?" Fortunately, students who are proactively seeking remote opportunities are highly motivated self-starters. That said, it's still important to make sure you provide the same level of instruction, support, supervision, and mentorship for an online intern as you would for a student in your office. Set clear expectations by providing examples or templates, discussing your preferences on communication, and establishing timelines. Virtual check-ins or weekly progress calls can help you stay in touch with your intern while they work remotely, and help students build communication skills.

Project-Based Internships are Well Suited for Remote Work

Project-based internships completed remotely offer additional benefits for students and companies. In the face of declining event attendance and rising travel costs, online projects enable students and companies to engage with one another in a way that goes beyond the limited interaction of career fairs or info sessions. As a result, companies can enhance their employer branding and assess the career readiness of prospective candidates for full-time roles and traditional internships. In addition, by working on a short-term project, even virtually, students have the opportunity to expand their network of professionals, explore career paths and industries, and consider companies outside of their current city.

Are Online Projects Right for Your Company?

When deciding whether to offer remote work for college students, consider further the types of candidates you are hiring. Current college students and recent graduates are ambitious, forward-thinking, and tech-savvy. By their very nature, top candidates can demonstrate their ability to get work done without someone looking over their shoulder by completing coursework. Rather than drawing from the most high-achieving students within driving distance, online projects allow you to recruit college students from around the United States.

*NACE = National Association of Colleges and Employers