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# Office of Career and Professional Development fostering learning through Internship Scholarship Program

February 13, 2020



*Megan Leben poses for a picture with NASCAR driver Martin Truex Jr after his win at the Coca-Cola 600 at Charlotte Motor Speedway. Leben interned with Truex's team, Joe Gibbs Racing last summer.*

Last summer, Megan Leben landed a dream internship with NASCAR team Joe Gibbs Racing, but despite her excitement, Leben faced obstacles relocating to Charlotte, N.C.

Leben, who is a junior public relations and multimedia journalism double major on the Georgia Southern University Statesboro Campus, would not have been able to afford to live in Charlotte for the summer if not for the Office of Career and Professional Development's (OCPD) Internship Scholarship Program (ISP), a program that helps students offset the costs of unpaid or low-paid professional internships.

"The money helped me pay for my rent, as living in Charlotte is much more expensive than living in Statesboro," Leben said. "I felt like the OCPD genuinely wanted to help me have the best internship experience possible by relieving some of the financial burden."

Leben's dilemma is common among college students. Internships are often required for students to complete their programs, but a lot of their options are unpaid or require a move, which severely limits their opportunities. The OCPD at Georgia Southern University is combating this problem through the ISP, which awarded \$35,450 to 21 students across all three campuses last year in its inaugural run.

The program is on track to award \$50,000 in 2020 to provide opportunities to more students. OCPD Director Glenn Gibney said the goal for the ISP is to be entirely funded by corporate sponsorship and community giving.

“By having a pool of dollars available to students to accept unpaid or low-paid professional internships, we can now proactively meet with area employers to actually create new internship opportunities,” Gibney said. “In this scenario, both the organization and our students win, and we help launch Georgia Southern students into the community.”

Students can use the scholarship money for whatever they need to complete the internship. Leben, who traveled to races as the main public relations representative for drivers, used hers for rent, but other recipients used their winnings for tuition, travel and child care, among other expenses.

Leben said support from the OCPD didn’t end once she started her internship.

“Mr. Gibney wanted to get to know me and spent a long time on the phone letting me tell him why I was so passionate about and excited for my internship experience,” Leben said. “The office checked on me throughout my internship and after my internship was over to make sure I had what I needed and felt supported. I am so grateful that they helped me last summer as it was my dream internship and confirmed that working in NASCAR is what I want to do in my life.”



*Megan O'Connor works with a dolphin at her internship in Roatan, Honduras. O'Connor, a marine biology major on the Armstrong Campus, interned at a marine science research center after receiving funds from the ISP.*

The ISP opened opportunities for students to intern all over the country and beyond. In 2019, scholarship winners worked in Hawaii, Washington D.C., Jacksonville, Atlanta, Southeast Georgia and Honduras, among other places.

Senior marine biology major on the Armstrong Campus, Megan O'Connor, interned at the Roatan Institute for Marine Sciences in Roatan, Honduras, last summer. There, she used field research methods to observe and record dolphins’ behavioral interactions in order to help collect data for ongoing research projects.

“Without the assistance from the ISP, my internship would not have been possible due to cost,” O'Connor said. “The OCPD is equipped with a very friendly and helpful staff. Throughout the entire process they were always willing to answer any questions I had.”

In 2019, the ISP assisted students in six of the university’s nine colleges. The program is especially beneficial for students in the College of Arts and Humanities because most arts-based internships are unpaid, Gibney said. He hopes all colleges are represented in the future.

“Experiential learning, such as professional internships, are a critical part of a student’s post-graduate success,” he said. “Today more than ever before, companies and organizations are seeking college graduates who have had career-related experience while going to school. Having a rewarding professional internship while at Georgia Southern creates new skills, new professional contacts and

real-world experience that students can draw on while interviewing.”