



BUSINESS / COLUMNISTS / **JAMIE HERZLICH**

Interns are coming back as COVID restrictions ease



Shown from left: Andrew Mateja, Nadajah Williams, Rachel Guastella, Olivia Bento, ClearVision Optical interns at the company's parking lot in Hauppauge. Credit: Photo Credit: Stephen Tripi

May 25, 2022

COVID put a damper on internships the last couple of years, but this summer is showing signs of returning somewhat to pre-COVID normalcy.

In fact, U.S. employers expect to boost their intern hiring by 22.6% this summer, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) 2022 Internship & Co-op Survey Report.

Locally, colleges, universities, and employers say demand is also strong for summer interns.

“Summer hiring for internships is way up compared to 2021,” says Jonathan Ivanoff, associate director of internships at Adelphi University in Garden City, who estimates it’s probably up double

digits locally too compared with last summer.

Multiple factors contribute to that, including the "great resignation" and the relaxing of COVID restrictions, says Ivanoff, seeing demand close to pre-pandemic levels.

Rena Varghese, executive director of the Nexus Center for Applied Learning & Career Development Farmingdale State College, witnessed improvement at the college's annual spring job fair held this month.

"We saw the percentage of employers seeking interns go up from 26% last year to 34%, with a 10% increase in the number of registered employers," Varghese says.

She too attributes it to COVID restrictions lifting and the worker shortage because of retirements and resignations.

Pipeline of talent

“One of the primary reasons companies invest in internships is to produce a potential pipeline of talent for the future,” says Shawn VanDerziel, executive director of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania-based NACE, a nonprofit professional association made up of HR campus recruiting and college career service professionals.

He said the latest survey numbers are a positive sign considering the hiring of interns has been down the last two summers from pre-COVID levels.

“This is somewhat of a correction though likely not a complete correction yet,” VanDerziel says.

The survey also reflects that close to 47% of employers this summer will provide a hybrid experience for interns, while 25.8% will hold internships exclusively in-person and 2.2% fully virtual. The remainder were undecided.

Both Ivanoff and Varghese are finding most local employers are seeking in-person summer interns. But Varghese said the number of employers specifically advertising on Farmingdale’s job site for hybrid or remote internships has increased this summer over last.

Jennifer Trakhtenberg, senior talent leader at ClearVision Optical, a Hauppauge-based designer and distributor of eyewear, says this year they will have a mix of remote and in-person internships split about 50-50, similar to last summer.

The firm currently has about 17 interns, which includes spring interns, but will probably add up to another half dozen interns for the summer, slightly more than last year.

Part of the team

“Our business is definitely growing and we’re also introducing some new business areas and specialties,” which is contributing to the increase, Trakhtenberg says. For instance, ClearVision’s adding new revenue lines to its distribution center. The company also is introducing 3D-printed eyewear, creating new opportunities to customize its products, which is why they’ll add a color and design specialist intern.

Interns are included in all team meetings and team-building experiences, and ClearVision has activities just for interns such as a video-gaming exercise recently with their head of technology.

All ClearVision internships are paid, with amounts that vary based on the position and academic level.

According to VanDerziel, the average hourly wage for bachelor's level interns is \$20.82.

Paid internships are especially critical if companies want to diversify their workforce for people of color, women, and first-generation college students, he says, noting “only a privileged few can actually afford to take an unpaid internship.”

Competing for talent

With the competitive environment for young talent, Ivanoff says he’s seeing more employers paying \$18 an hour for summer internships, a bit higher than last summer.

Scott Fisher, partner-in-charge of the summer internship program at Jaspan Schlesinger LLP in Garden City, says all their internships are paid.

He says the law firm has hired five interns from law schools for this summer, up from three last year. Pre-pandemic, the firm averaged between four and six summer interns, he says.



Shown from left: Nicole Imperatore, law clerk, Scott Fisher, Partner at Jaspan Schlesinger LLP,(standing) Joseph Galasso, law clerk and Deborah Epstein, law clerk at the Jaspan Schlesinger LLP conference room in Garden City. Credit: Jaspan Schlesinger LLP

This year, like last, all interns will be in-person barring any state mandates, he says, noting "for the nature of the job it's very helpful to have face-to-face interactions."

Depending on the assignments, the goal is to provide real work experience across all firm practice areas, Fisher says.

"The program provides a potential pipeline for full-time employment after graduation, depending on the hiring needs of the firm at that time," he says.

Usually, every year they've had at least one join the firm, he says, noting, "we've had some good success in that regard."

Employers should keep this in mind when crafting their summer internship programs and think about offering competitive pay and flexibility, Varghese says.

"Employers who recognize internships as pipelines for industry will benefit from saving recruiting and training costs," she says.