



PathTech LISTEN

Mixed Methods Longitudinal Investigations of Students in Technician Education

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Work Based Learning in Technical Programs Kristopher Oliviera, M.A.

Participants in this wave of data collection were explicitly asked if they had participated in internships, apprenticeships, or co-ops and many of them had engaged in this experience. Many of the participants (34 out of 97) had completed an internship. Internship experiences varied across our sample, including participating in two and even three internships. Some participants described internships that were connected to their degree programs, while others shared that they participated in an internship before enrolling in a CTC program. And while most of the participants engaged in internship experiences in the United States, a few students described their experiences interning or apprenticing for industries in other countries such as Cameroon, Mexico the UK, and the Netherlands.

The participants described the work that they did in their internship and were often able to identify clear connections between what they were learning in the classroom and the work they were doing in the field. It seems that developing these skills in a practical work-based-learning setting was often an intentional outcome, as many of the former students shared that completing an internship was a degree requirement for graduation. In reflecting on the value of an internship, some stated that the internship helped them come to understand what the work was actually like.

I learned how to double check everything before I turned it into my boss. I learned how to get up every morning and go to work at 7:00 AM. I learned how to talk to clients, and my boss, and how to carry myself. ... I'd say that was the main takeaway. I learned technical carpentry skill that I still obviously use day-to-day, but I think starting out as the apprentice that was the most important thing was just learning how to work so to speak.

For a few of the participants the internship experience inspired them to shift their career plans; they discovered that the work was not what they had hoped and made plans to pursue a different career.

I took an internship in the field I was interested in entering, just to double check and make sure that that's what I wanted to get myself into, and that was honestly, quite an enlightenment experience.

In terms of apprenticeships, several students stated that they participated in apprenticeships and de-

scribed the connection between the required courses for their apprenticeship, and that hands-on, real world, work experiences they had with their apprenticeship supervisors. One participant described what he learned in his own apprenticeship, and how it helps him and his company to value the internship experience for interns that they take on. When asked how he connected technical classroom skills to his apprenticeship experience, he said:

It's every day, especially when you talk of the apprenticeship, which was really the elementary day one side of that job, just like how to hold a tape measure. ... At any point I've got two or three kids under me working as interns.

These kids have better education qualifications than I do, but they never learned how to work, and I think that's mainly what I learned starting out at that apprenticeship.

And while the team of interviewers explicitly asked about students who had participated in co-ops, only one participant had that experience. There were a number of students in this sample who indicated that they had not participated in an internship experience. Some explanations for why students had not participated in internships were that they were not interested; that the internships were unpaid; that students felt under qualified to participate in an internship; or that they were already working - and in some cases they were already working in a field in their degree program. In some cases, the explanations overlapped. Additionally, a few students mentioned that they had been too late to apply or had not realized the importance of an internship experience until it was too late to apply. In some cases, they expressed hope that they might be able to complete an internship in the future.

Participants learned about internships and apprenticeships from a variety of sources. In many instances, the students indicated that they learned about internships through their program or specific instructors. Others indicated that they had a friend, family member, or existing relationship that made them aware of internship opportunities. And a few participants learned about internships at job fairs and through their career center. Some participants shared that they also utilized job-search engines in order to do research about internship opportunities.