



The University of Vermont

Crash-Testing Snowboard Bindings All in a Day's Work for Student Intern

UVM's expanded internship program takes students to Burton and beyond



logan_williams.jpg

(MONDAY, August 12, 2013) -- Burton Snowboard's formidable R&D operation -- "pretty much the ultimate prototyping facility for our industry in the world," according to company founder and CEO Jake Burton -- is located on the outskirts of Burlington in a cavernous warehouse next to the company's headquarters. Inside its corrugated metal walls is a collection of custom built machines and rapid prototyping equipment that can crank out an experimental new snowboard in a day or a prototype binding in a few hours.

This summer, the building is also home to UVM senior Logan Williams.

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The mechanical engineering major from Vergennes, VT, who began a summer internship with the company in June, has a big job. With the help of a Burton engineer named Jeff Burga, he's designing a machine resembling a compact swing set that will test the ability of a new generation of snowboard bindings to endure all manner of simulated crashes.

Williams landed his internship thanks in part to a new partnership between UVM's College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences (CEMS) and Vermont HITEC, a workforce development company with deep ties to Vermont employers, that has placed engineering and math students in summer internships around the state.

He's one of a bumper crop of UVM students with challenging internship positions this summer, the product of a new effort to expand and consolidate the university's many internship initiatives. The new internship push has both evolved organically in UVM academic units and departments, as in the case of CEMS and Vermont HITEC, and been consciously set in motion by the internship recommendations in a comprehensive plan -- the Career Success Action Plan -- Honors College dean Abu Rizvi and a team of colleagues created last year at the request of UVM president Tom Sullivan.

UVM has helped students land internships for years -- last year the Career Services office listed 1,723 on its website. So, why the interest in ramping things up?

"According to national survey information, parents and students are very interested in making sure their investment in college leads to a job and a career," says Rizvi. "Things that help students figure out how to relate their academic interests to eventual career interests and to land a job are very important in this atmosphere."

There's no doubt internships do just that. Internships and employment during college are the top traits employers consider in evaluating recent graduates for a position, eclipsing GPA and major, according to a survey conducted last year by the *Chronicle of Higher Education and Marketplace*, the public radio program.

Headway

Rizvi and his team have already put in place or laid the groundwork for several of the internship prescriptions in the career success plan. The team drafted a university-wide framework for academic departments to grant credit for internships, for instance, which the Faculty Senate's curriculum committee will review in the fall. Rizvi also met with a receptive UVM Foundation, urging that the forthcoming campaign include a push for gifts to fund unpaid internships. One donor has already stepped forward.

But the most obvious signs of progress are two new positions in Career Services that have just been filled: an internship coordinator, who will work with students, employers and academic departments to create and fill new internships, and an employer relations professional, who'll

network with employers largely to find job opportunities for graduating seniors, but will also, inevitably, learn of many new internship opportunities Career Services can promote.

For Career Services director Pamela Gardner, whose understaffed office has had to address internships on a catch-as-catch-can basis in the past, the new hires represent “a quantum leap forward.”

Following another recommendation in the career success plan, a just hired staffer at UVM Extension will place students in 30 food systems internships beginning in the fall.

Evolving organically

Meanwhile, as the central administration beefs up UVM's internship infrastructure, things are evolving organically at the unit level.

The CEMS/Vermont HITEC partnership just finished a six-month pilot and began a new year-long contract on July 1. With funds from a grant secured by Sen. Patrick Leahy, Vermont HITEC has placed 29 students like Logan Williams in demanding summer internships, placed six in full time employment, and advised 60 more from the office it opened in Votey Building in January.

Also, the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources has rolled out a new program of “perennial” internships, positions that will be available to students every summer in a growing number of organizations. And many of UVM's other colleges and schools have expanded the number of internships they offer through their departments. Animal Sciences, for instance, in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, placed 46 students in for-credit internships this year, up from 28 five years ago.

Williams is a beneficiary of the new internship push, even if he isn't aware of all the ferment on campus.

“It's not like school where you just have to think about engineering,” Williams says. “This is the best way to learn an actual career. In school, you don't get nearly the experience that you get doing even simple tasks here. Here, I'm learning how to run a business and getting to work on all these awesome projects. No industry experience probably isn't a good thing.”