

# Insights from the University of Cincinnati Paid Internship Education Program

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**Abstract:** The University of Cincinnati is the birthplace of the paid internship program in the world and it has the most number of compulsory paid internship programs in the United States. Their paid internship education program has rich experience and remarkable results in curriculum arrangement, internship management and government support. However, the internship for vocational colleges in China faces problems such as low enthusiasm from industry, difficulty in internship management and insufficient government support. Drawing on the experience of paid internship education in the United States, the school and the industry jointly planned the internship training program, and finally established a collaboration model that benefits the three parties of the academia, the industry and the students.

**Keywords:** Paid internship; Vocational internship; Academic-industrial collaboration; Work-study combination; Paid internship consultant

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## 1 Introduction

From March 2019 to April 2020, I was fully funded by the China Scholarship Council (CSC) to study at the School of Education, Criminal Justice and Public Service at the University of Cincinnati as a visiting scholar. During this year, I participated in the survey on paid internship projects and also received the training from paid internship project instructors.

The paid internship program, (Cooperative

Education, Co-op for short), is an education model that combines students' academic courses with full-time jobs selected in their professional fields during the traditional semester. It is a tripartite collaboration between schools, students, and companies to promote each other. The University of Cincinnati is the pioneer of the paid internship education program in the world. It has rich experience in the effective development of the project, which can bring some insights to the internship in China's higher vocational education.

## 2 University of Cincinnati Paid Internship Education Program

In 1906, Professor. Herman Schneider, the Dean of the College of Engineering at University of Cincinnati, proposed for the first time in history: "Let college students enter factories or companies related to their majors for internships". The employers will pay these college students remuneration not lower than the local minimum wage. Students can use the remuneration from these works to pay for tuition or living expenses. In this way, the students can apply the theoretical knowledge learned in the classroom to specific applications, and various problems or challenges encountered in work will further encourage students to explore the answers in the classroom. For the employers, they also get to hire a young and strong workforce. This is the prototype of the paid internship program. After that, this educational model was quickly promoted in more than 40 countries around the world. After more than one hundred years of development, the University of Cincinnati has become a research-based university with the largest number of paid internship programs

in the United States.

(1)The students participating in the project are mainly some undergraduate and master students from the University of Cincinnati. Among them, all undergraduates of the DAAP College and College of Engineering must participate in paid internships, while other colleges such as business schools and liberal arts colleges are free to choose whether to participate in the project. Compulsory paid internship majors must take 5 semesters of paid internship courses to graduate. Students are very enthusiastic about participating in the project. According to the 2016-2017 academic year data, 3,835 students from CEASCEAS College of Engineering/IT participated in paid internships, with a participation rate of 92.5%, and 1,606 students from the DAAP School of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning participated in paid internships with a participation rate of 100%. Each paid intern student works 40 hours a week and earns between \$1,700 - \$2,500 USD per month. In the 12 to 18 months of internship, the minimum per capita income is \$40,000 USD, and the maximum can reach \$60,000 USD. During the internship, students do not need to pay tuition, but need to pay a registration fee of \$465.

(2)There are about 1,500 participating companies, all over the United States and even around the world. Cincinnati is an important industrial and commercial city in the United States with a developed economy. At the same time, it is also a major port in the Midwest and a railway hub between the East and the West. It has convenient transportation and is adjacent to Canada. Many internationally renowned enterprises have established their own bases or headquarters here. The locations of paid internships include but are not limited to the states of the United States, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom in Europe, Japan, Sri Lanka, and India in Asia, and Peru, Brazil, and Argentina in South America. Most of these employers are among the top 500 companies in the world. For example, NASA, Apple, Microsoft, Google, General Motors, Dell, General Electric, BMW, Procter & Gamble, Toyota, Siemens, Delta Airlines, Macy's, Colgate, Olay, Nike, and Reebok, etc. These reputable companies provide excellent internship opportunities for the students of the university.

(3)In the spring semester of the freshman year, a course on the introduction of paid internships will be commenced, and all freshmen will be assigned with

Career Advisors to prepare them for undertaking the paid internships steadily. Some colleges that must participate in the paid internship program adopt the 4+1 academic system, that is, starting from the sophomore year, students have to undertake internship for 4-5 months each academic year for three consecutive academic years. Students participating in the internship can apply to adjust the total duration of the internship according to their personal learning status. The adjusted minimum internship duration can be no shorter than 12 months, and the longest internship duration can be no longer than 18 months.

(4)The results of paid internship are good. The paid internship program is a course program that works closely with the school's career development center (the center ranks first in the United States). Their projects enable students' interests and abilities to be maximized, and the students can better combine theory with practice, gain a deep understanding on the future development of the profession, gain necessary information for future employment, and obtain latest news on employment after graduation. Therefore, the employment rate of fresh undergraduates at the University of Cincinnati is about 85%, and the employment rate of graduate students is about 90%. Because employers have established a good collaborative relationship with interns, more than 87% of students choose to sign employment contracts with their intern companies upon graduation.

(5)The University of Cincinnati receives 405 million research funding each year, of which about 20% is spent on various academic internships including paid internship programs. These research funds are mainly borne by the state government, collaborating enterprises, school boards, and famous alumni.

### **3 China's Higher Vocational Education Internship Project**

The internship in China originated from the "Vocational Internship" project carried out by Hebei Normal University. It was originally aimed at solving the talent shortage of "rural education" and encouraging normal school students to go to the countryside to support education. Now it has expanded to various higher vocational colleges and application-oriented institutions. Due to the lack of scientific curriculum, good internship management mode and systematic government support, the effects

of vocational internship is not satisfactory.

(1) Companies are not enthusiastic about participating in paid internship projects.

According to the relevant regulations of the Ministry of Education, "higher vocational students must carry out internships in enterprises no less than 6 months before graduation." In order to maximize profits, many enterprises fear that their production efficiency will be dragged down by interns and are unwilling to let novices operate all kinds of machines or lathes, and they generally have a skeptical or negative attitude towards students' participation in production practice. They reduce the actual internship time of students to 3 months, and many specific internship tasks cannot be completed according to the preset plan.

(2)The students' enthusiasm for internship is not high. Students have a wrong understanding of internship. They generally think that internship is just a path to obtain a diploma, and they don't regard it as a good opportunity to practice the theories learned.

(3)Some schools have misconceptions about internships. They did not strictly abide by the principle of professional matching, equating vocational internships with cheap labor, and converted vocational internships into simple work, which violated the goals of talent training and subject teaching plans.

(4)The internship locations are scattered, which brings great difficulties to the management of internship instructors. The small number of professional instructors and the scattered locations has caused some students to encounter various difficulties or setbacks during the internship, and even when they encounter infringements of their rights, they could not get help from teachers or schools in time.

(5)Government support is limited. The education authority lacks necessary publicity on the "Decision of the State Council to Vigorously Develop Vocational Education", "The Ministry of Education's Several Opinions on Comprehensively Improving the Quality of Higher Vocational Education and Teaching" and other relevant documents. The government's legislative department has not passed laws aiming at relevant enterprises to ensure the implementation of internship, and the financial department does not provide a fixed funding guarantee. These factors make the results of vocational internship poor.

#### **4 Insights from the Paid Internship Program of the University of Cincinnati on the Internship Education in China**

As the originator of paid internships, the University of Cincinnati's paid internships for undergraduates have distinct characteristics and remarkable results, which can bring some insights to the difficulties encountered by internships in China.

(1)The government takes the initiative to guide enterprises in actively participating in internship projects. On one hand, legislation can be passed to compel state-owned large and medium-sized enterprises to admit a certain number of intern students to the enterprises to carry out production and practice of related skills. On the other hand, for private enterprises that actively participate in internship cooperation, taxes can be appropriately reduced. Actively participate in the "Belt and Road Initiative" and encourage multinational companies to set up research and development institutions in China.

(2)Establish internship courses scientifically and refine the management of intern students. The school takes the initiative to invite well-known companies to participate in the planning of professional training programs and curriculum standards of the colleges. From easy to difficult, the tasks of internship are arranged in stages. In the spring semester of the freshmen year, a course of "Introduction to Paid Internship" can be set. Following the practice of the University of Cincinnati, train a group of paid internship consultants with professional qualities. Their functions include, but are not limited to, providing consultation and guidance to students before internships, helping students prepare for paid internships; recommending companies related to the students' majors for student to research on; meeting students to help them enhance interview and social interaction skills; research on the companies most likely to hire students; evaluate students' job searching skills and closely monitor their progress; train students to tailor résumé and cover letters; and focus on students who are facing difficulties in finding paid internship jobs, etc.

(3)Fully tap on the human resources of local celebrities and famous alumni to provide opportunities for students to participate in high-level internships. Local celebrities and influential alumni can not only provide a certain amount of

financial support to the school, but also be hired as spokespersons for the internship program. Through their promotion, they will strive to make people from all walks of life to pay attention to and understand the vocational internship program, and expand the societal recognition and support for the internships.

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