

STUDENT INTERNSHIP-UNION MENTORING INITIATIVE

(text from the website: <http://unionmentors.org>)

ABOUT THIS INITIATIVE

The union-led *Student Internship-Union Mentoring Initiative* offers a program model (<http://www.unionmentors.org/program-model/>), or blueprint, for how unions and their signatory employers in a wide variety of sectors can work together to reach out to and nurture the next generation of workers by engaging high school students in paid internship experiences under the careful guidance of trained union mentors.

This model originated within the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW[®]) under the leadership of the IBEW's telecommunications unions in New England. The model was originally launched in 2000 within the New England states in recognition that the telecommunications sector would be losing a critical mass of highly skilled employees to retirement in the not too distant future and that labor and management both had a vested interest in nurturing the next generation of skilled workers. The story of this unique and dynamic venture within the telecommunications sector has been captured in a 15-minute video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efdWISGTabU&feature=youtu.be>) produced by members of IBEW Local 1228.

The *Student Internship-Union Mentoring* model has wide applicability across sectors and has now been successfully field-tested and replicated in multiple settings including integrating youth interns into –

- **the design and manufacture of helicopters and submarines**
- **energy generation**
- **public service and educational administration**
- **the protection of municipal water supplies through local water pollution control authorities**
- **and more!**

Thanks to the notable leadership and vision of several Local Unions, some *especially notable* student internship-union mentoring initiatives have been carried out in recent years by labor-management partnerships at

- **Sikorsky Aircraft in Stratford, CT – with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Local 1150 (<http://www.teamsters1150.org/careerpathways.html>); This exceptional example of the student internship-union mentoring program model is captured in a 15-minute video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkGvSJfKV48&feature=youtu.be>) produced by IBT Local 1150 in 2011. [This effort was nationally recognized by the AFL-CIO Working for America Institute as an exemplary workforce development program. (http://www.workingforamerica.org/toolkit/case_study6b.asp)]**
- **General Dynamics/Electric Boat in Groton, CT – with the Marine Draftsmen's Association, UAW Local 571 (and also with the Metal Trades Council of New London County/AFL-CIO, until affiliated unions within the Council faced some downsizing).**
- **Groton Utilities and the Groton Water Pollution Control Authority in Connecticut – with United Steelworkers Local 9411 and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Council 4, Locals 1303 and 818 (Groton Utilities chapters).**

The Student Internship-Union Mentoring Concept Has Come Full Circle!

Since the inception of this program model, a number of student interns who have been part of a union mentoring program have been hired as full-time employees at the worksites in which they interned. And, after attaining several years (or more) of work experience, some of these former interns have volunteered to serve as mentors for more recent interns. Participating unions and employers tell heartwarming stories about interns from the early to mid 2000s who, as full-time workers and union members in the 2010s, have stepped forward eagerly to become union mentors. With their mentored internship having been such a formative part of their own career path, these former interns report that they want to give back what they received and to lend a helping hand to start yet another young person on a rewarding career in a skilled union job.

CONTACT US

We welcome inquiries from unions and other stakeholders about the *Student Internship-Union Mentoring Program* model -- and we encourage Local Unions to consider replicating this dynamic education and youth outreach initiative within the workplace(s) you represent. Please feel free to send us your questions or comments.

PROGRAM MODEL

The core of the *Student Internship-Union Mentoring Program* model is a mentored summer internship experience at a unionized workplace, typically for about eight weeks, for a diverse cross-section of high school students. The internship features:

- an introduction to job interviewing and testing
- an introduction to workplace skills and expectations – and work requirements such as punctuality, communications, listening, reasoning, problem-solving, and computer skills;
- the guidance and supervision of an existing front-line worker/union member who serves as the intern's on-site mentor as well as the support of others in the workplace (all union mentors are provided with union-led mentor training).
- actual work experience and a regular paycheck;
- the opportunity for the intern to be a full-fledged employee and union member at the worksite and to receive an entry level (or intern-level) union wage;
- an introduction to an entire industry and to the multiple technical and craft jobs that make up a worksite in which the intern is working;
- an introduction to labor-management relations and labor history, including a unique "Labor History Day" educational experience.

To complement the actual work-based learning component and to ensure that it is part of a learning system rather than just a summer job, the program design calls for working closely with local education and other youth-serving community partners, and – wherever possible – to involve parents through a pre-internship orientation and/or a post-internship recognition activity. Although they are still students, workplace interns are supported and guided by collaborating unions and union-trained mentors and thus are embraced as workplace "peers" of their co-workers. Therefore, they are expected to approach their work with the same kinds of diligence, responsibility, teamwork, and joint problem-solving that are expected of any other employee.

STUDENT INTERNS

A key objective of the *Student Internship-Union Mentoring Program* model is to introduce teenagers to the world of work and to dynamic career possibilities within a unionized setting.

Through real on-the-job work experience provided with the careful guidance of a union mentor, students learn about highly skilled work, about general workplace expectations, and about all aspects of the workplace or sector in which they are working. They also learn about the importance of workers exercising a collective voice to ensure high work quality and productivity, decent compensation, and an atmosphere of dignity and respect within the workplace.

Student Roles and Responsibilities

These are the basic expectations of all student interns:

- Commit to participation in the full summer internship program, including all key program activities (this includes scheduling vacation time only before or after the internship);
- Report to work on time;
- Cooperate with the assigned union mentor, and strive to resolve any concerns or problems through established labor-management channels;
- Remain fully engaged in all work and learning activities for the full duration of the internship program;
- Share information about the program with school personnel and potential future interns;
- Provide feedback that will assist both union and management in program improvement.

In Their Own Voices

Hear some comments from students in New England who participated in the initial (2000) IBEW rollout of the student internship-union mentoring model – in collaboration with Verizon Communications (<http://youtu.be/fNAsjLPVlx0>).

Learning at Work

The *Student Internship-Union Mentoring Initiative's "Learning at Work" Student Handbook* (<http://unionmentors.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Learning-At-Work-Student-Handbook1.pdf>) provides student interns (and union mentors) with a guide for how to optimize the learning (and teaching) opportunities provided through a student internship-union mentoring initiative. Union mentors are often given a preview of this handbook through a mentor training program, and new student interns are often provided a copy of this handbook as part of their intern orientation.

UNION MENTORS

The *Union Mentor* is the key factor in a successful *Student Internship-Union Mentoring Program*. The mentor serves as a guide, a coach, a teacher, and an ongoing resource for the student intern. Both students and parents have sometimes described the working/coaching relationship between mentor and student intern as life-changing in multiple positive ways.

Union leaders should recruit and select workplace mentors based on their skills and diligence on their job, their interest or experience in working with young people, and their engagement with the union. First and foremost,

the mentor must want to serve in this capacity for a student intern. Second, the mentor must be willing to attend a day-long Mentor Training Program (during the work day) prior to the start of any internship program in order to fully understand the scope of the program and his or her responsibilities as a mentor for a teenage worker. As a shorthand rule of thumb, union leaders should recruit as mentors only those workers with whom they would want their own teenage children to work.

Because it is expected that the union mentors may have vacation time or other days off during the summer or may be called away from their core work at any point in time, it is optimal for each mentor to have one or more back-up mentors who also attend mentor training and are available to serve as an alternate mentor whenever needed. In some workplaces, labor and management plan from the beginning for two workers to share equally in the mentoring of one intern during the courses of the internship.

Mentor Roles and Responsibilities

These are the basic expectations of all union mentors:

- Participate in mentor training;
- Serve as a student's mentor: Provide daily guidance, education, hands-on work experience to intern; assist intern in development of technical, communications, and problem-solving skills; and engage in ongoing dialogue with the intern about the union, the collective-bargaining agreement, and the benefits and responsibilities of union membership;
- Make alternative mentoring arrangements for the student intern, when necessary, to accommodate the primary mentor's absence;
- Coordinate opportunities for interns to see – or possibly work in – other areas of the workplace, in consultation with other workers and supervisors as appropriate;
- Engage in problem-solving as needed, using appropriate channels (it is desirable to try to solve problems first and foremost, through the "union family");
- Participate in key program activities, including orientation, safety training, Labor History Day, closing event;
- Provide feedback that will assist both union and management in program improvement.

In Their Own Voices

Hear some comments from mentors in New England who participated in the initial (2000) IBEW rollout of the Student Internship-Union Mentoring Program model (<http://youtu.be/Zs3F2P3GVlc>) – in collaboration with Verizon Communications.

"Dimensions of Mentoring" Training Handbook for Union Mentors

An adequate training and orientation session for participating mentors is essential to a successful *Student Internship-Union Mentoring Initiative*. The "Dimensions of Mentoring" curriculum (<http://unionmentors.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/DimensionsofMentoring.pdf>) provides the core content for a day-long mentor training program for union mentors and back-up mentors. Any mentor training session should also include time for discussion with management representatives to ensure that all partners – from union leaders to management personnel to front-line supervisors to union mentors – are fully informed about all aspects of internship scheduling and logistics and therefore are on the same wavelength in terms of program implementation.

EMPLOYERS

Employers who have utilized the *Student Internship-Union Mentoring* model have described such an initiative as a valuable workforce development tool. Participating employers specifically indicate that workforce recruitment and retention and fostering workplace diversity are centerpieces of their engagement in an internship-mentoring program. Employers also recognize that providing paid student internships within the context of a structured union mentoring program is an important public service and is a highly visible demonstration of good corporate citizenship within the local community.

“As our workforce matures and longtime employees begin to think about retirement, these students represent the next generation of Sikorsky employees who carry on the legacy of those who came before them.”

–Joe Grabinsky (2008)
Internship Program Coordinator,
Teamsters Local 1150 (Sikorsky Aircraft)

Recruiting and retaining the next generation of workers can be expensive. And employers know that it is a real challenge to find a new employee who truly comprehends what she or he is being hired to do and who fits well within the workplace culture. Through a paid *Student Internship-Union Mentoring Program*, however, employers have an opportunity to introduce potential future employees to all aspects of their workplace. And, potential employees of tomorrow have an opportunity to experience a particular workplace and the occupational paths it provides and to determine if this is a place at which they might aspire to work.

“You know what, let’s do it. If we can’t put a few dollars aside to invest in the future, then what are we really doing here.”

–former City of Groton, CT Mayor Dennis Popp
(after being approached by a WPCA union leader about developing a student internship union initiative at the Groton, CT Water Pollution Control Authority)

In Their Own Voices

Hear some employer representatives who participated in the initial (2000) IBEW –Verizon Communications rollout of the Student Internship-Union Mentoring Program Model enthusiastically describe how such a program is indeed worth their investment (<http://youtu.be/SMnMH33ljWg>).

Employer Roles and Responsibilities

These are some basic expectations of a *Student Internship-Union Mentoring Initiative's* management partners:

- Commit to program funding – including funding for student wages; materials and safety equipment expenses; and release time for mentors and planners, for mentor training, and for a labor history day experience;
- Work with the union to identify appropriate paid job placements for student interns;
- Ensure a smooth employment process for student interns;
- Provide supervisory oversight, and serve as a visible program proponent within the workplace;
- Communicate management's full commitment to program planning and successful implementation and ensure the timely flow of information about the program to all supervisory levels;
- In collaboration with the union, identify, coordinate outreach to, and maintain relationships with participating schools;
- Participate in the student recruitment process, in partnership with union personnel;
- Identify opportunities for program visibility and recognition;
- Engage in timely problem-solving when needed;
- Provide feedback that will assist both union and management in program improvement.

EDUCATORS AND PARENTS

Educators and parents have consistently characterized the *Student Internship-Union Mentoring Program* model as a “win-win-win” – for the family, for schools, and for participating students. The IBEW captured several parents and educators on video during the early days of the roll-out of its *Student Internship-Union Mentoring Initiative* in New England (<http://youtu.be/flSxBFvPHew>). In the video, one parent observed, "The mentoring program is not just a summer job, it's opening up a whole world of opportunity." An educator commented, "I was very impressed with the excitement and enthusiasm of everybody involved. The students came back [to school] and they told me, and this is a quote, 'I couldn't believe all the things that I learned during the summer internship program.'"

In commenting on the internship-mentoring initiative at Groton, CT Water Pollution Control Authority, a Connecticut state official noted that interns themselves often take on the role of educators and career recruiters as she lauded an intern-turned-full-time employee's ability to "talk eloquently about his job. . . he clearly got the big picture of the work that he is doing."

LABOR HISTORY DAY

A signature component of the summertime *Student Internship-Union Mentoring* model is a day-long Labor History Day. This is a paid working day away from the workplace during which student interns, union mentors, and other invited guests (such as workplace supervisors and managers, union officers and stewards, labor leaders, or education partners) participate in a multi-faceted educational program focused on U.S. Labor History. The day's activities are also meant to help mentors and interns understand how the story of their own workplace union (or unions) fits within the past and present of the U.S. Labor Movement. Scenes from a 2011 Labor History Day involving several eastern Connecticut public sector union mentors and their student interns have been captured in an 8-minute video (<http://youtu.be/tSIDCE5n90c>).

Most often, this unique educational day is organized by the Local Union or by a regional Central Labor Council or other Labor Federation. Labor History Day typically draws upon the expertise of area labor historians or other educators to design and deliver an engaging and informative educational experience. Most Labor History Day programs also feature a memorable re-enactment of a turn-of-the-20th century assembly line experience (<http://youtu.be/ATN-41LN4BE>) during which attendees go back in time, take on the role of factory workers, and are exposed to the conditions and work expectations of that period.

The day also typically includes short lectures (<http://youtu.be/khUJ5gvsuzA>) or presentations (http://youtu.be/IrD_rgiYzX0), discussion sessions, films, experiential activities such as role-playing or "labor history jeopardy," and a walking tour (if the site used for the Labor History Day has a labor history connection).

This one-day program is meant to complement and add to the education that individual union mentors already provide to interns about labor-management relations and the collective bargaining process in their own workplace.

A local museum, such as the Windham Textile and History Museum in Willimantic, CT (<http://www.millmuseum.org/>) or the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury, CT (<http://www.mattatuckmuseum.org/>), where numerous Labor History Day events have been held, may be an ideal location for a Labor History Day experience. The Lowell, Massachusetts National Historical Park (<http://www.nps.gov/lowe/index.htm>), the only National Park devoted to the history of U.S. industrial workers, has also been the site of a number of Labor History Day events.