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Tried & true

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Internships may be the oldest engaged learning activity on campus, but they remain a popular method for students to examine their academic and career interests.

In 1996, few had heard the term engaged learning, save perhaps the architects of Furman’s strategic plan. While the university community was familiar with internships and undergraduate research and the new importance being placed on the use of technology in the classroom, the connections among these activities remained unrecognized. Finding a term that encompassed all of these activities and declaring it to be the centerpiece of the strategic plan was the primary charge of the Strategic Planning Committee.

Four years later, engaged learning is engrained in the university’s psyche as the defining characteristic of a Furman education. The university has described engaged learning as a problem-solving, project-oriented and experience-based approach to the liberal arts. True to the vision of its progenitors, engaged learning takes a holistic approach — it emphasizes a variety of activities rather than concentrating on one or two, recognizing that engaged learning takes different forms in different disciplines. Building on the cornerstone of the flagship Furman Advantage Program (which had developed strong undergraduate research and internship programs) and on the university’s study abroad offerings, engaged learning expanded to include service learning, a technology initiative, and active learning in the classroom.

This commitment has been backed with resources from the university and with generous donations from The Duke Endowment and the Hipp family of Greenville. In 1996, the Furman Advantage Program supported 30 research students; today, it funds 40 students. During the same period, the number of Furman Advantage interns increased from 20 to 30. Student stipends for both programs also increased. Additionally, new programs to support engaged learning opportunities for minority and high-ability students were established. In 1998, the Christian A. Johnson Center for Engaged Learning was created to coordinate and champion engaged learning activities on campus.

The strategic plan has focused Furman’s resources on engaged learning, and the Class of 2000 was the first to see it move from periphery to center. The vignettes that follow showcase the significant role that the oldest engaged learning activity on campus — the internship — had in the undergraduate experience of five students and the impact the internships had on their career plans.

— Glen A. Halva-Neubauer
Director, Christian A. Johnson Center for Engaged Learning
Angela Highbaugh says she has always been interested in the field of medicine, but she points to an incident when she was in the ninth grade as a defining moment in her decision to pursue a medical career.

She had broken her arm and was in the hospital, sharing a room with a younger child. As she awaited treatment, Highbaugh recalls a doctor entering the room and informing her roommate’s mother that because the family had no insurance, they would have to go elsewhere. The mother argued that she was insured but that the paperwork was unavailable and her husband, who could explain, was out of town. The doctor was unmoved, and the child was required to leave.

“I couldn’t believe this sort of thing could happen, especially to a child,” says Highbaugh, who received her Furman degree in mathematics this spring. “It made me realize how important it is for patients to feel that the doctor cares about treating them and not just their illness.”

Highbaugh, who aspires to a career in pediatric medicine, begins pursuit of her goal this fall at Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, Ga. She believes she is well prepared for the challenge ahead; in addition to her coursework at Furman, she spent two summers as an intern at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

Her job title was “office automation clerk,” but Highbaugh says that the internship offered her access to doctors and medical personnel that might not have been available had she interned in a laboratory setting. She was able to accompany doctors on “grand rounds,” attend sessions where outbreaks of diseases were discussed and analyzed, contribute to the investigation of an outbreak, and attend a public health conference featuring Nobel laureates.

“I had a lot of lab work at Furman,” she says, “and I felt this type of position would allow me to talk more directly with the medical staff at CDC about what they did and how they did it. It was an opportunity to be involved in the medical field from a different perspective.”

Many of the epidemiologists at CDC, she discovered, had started in pediatrics. “They were eager to help and to answer my questions,” she says. “I saw in-depth what this aspect of medicine was like, and I had access to a huge library of medical texts and journals. The CDC looks out for its interns, and it was a wonderful way to make contacts in the field.”

At Furman Highbaugh participated in a wide range of activities. An all-Southern Conference sprinter on the track team, where she specialized in the 400-meter dash, she was also president of the Student League for Black Culture, an academic tutor and a soup kitchen volunteer. She was elected to Who’s Who and to Senior Order, the honorary women’s leadership organization.

Highbaugh says her athletic experience was, in many ways, an internship experience all its own. “You definitely learn to budget your time,” she says, “but you also come to understand the value of being involved in something where you feel supported, where you believe someone’s backing you. So it’s important to be honest and to keep the lines of communication open.

“The same applies to medical school. If things become difficult, you need to recognize this and find help — and to be there for others if they’re in a similar situation.”

— Jim Stewart
The Washington Program, established by Furman's political science department in 1980, has provided more than 500 students the opportunity to work in government and policy-related internships.

The jobs help students understand the inner workings of government and gain valuable contacts in Washington, D.C. Most of the internships are with governmental agencies or law firms.

So it was unusual when Raegan Woodson chose a different path.

During the summer of 1999, while many of her Furman classmates dashed off in suits and office attire to work in big office buildings, Woodson put on more comfortable clothes and commuted to a much different part of the city.

An urban studies major with an interest in non-profit service agencies, she signed on as a volunteer and intern at a pediatric center that cares for children whose lives have been affected, in one way or another, by the HIV virus.

Woodson, a native of Lawton, Okla., spent much of her internship coordinating an after-school program for the children at the clinic, which is located in a disadvantaged section of the city. Much of her time, she says, was spent interacting and playing games with the children. When she wasn’t working directly with the children, Woodson wrote grant applications, answered the phones and provided administrative assistance to the small staff.

Some of the children at the clinic were infected with HIV; others had a family member stricken with the fatal virus. She says she grew to love the children, many of whom turned to her for counseling, affection and guidance. Woodson even attended the funeral of one 8-year-old’s mother who had died of AIDS. She calls the period “a real time of brokenness.”

The job’s 12-hour days left her exhausted, but it also expanded her horizons and exposed her to a world that most Furman students would never see. It was a harsh but eye-opening form of engaged learning.

At night, she and her Furman friends would recap their days and discuss office politics and workplace gossip. “My roommates would tell me about troubles at their job, and I would just think back to what some of those children were going through,” Woodson says. “The job really put things in perspective. It wasn’t something that I was physically or emotionally prepared for.”

Woodson persevered, though, and earned rave reviews from her supervisors. More importantly, she found her calling.

After she completed the internship and returned to Furman last fall for her senior year, Woodson could not escape thoughts of the clinic and the children. “I just can’t wait to get back there,” she said this spring.

And now she is.

Woodson, who graduated in May, has returned to Washington with Americorps, the domestic Peace Corps, and is continuing her work with children affected by the HIV virus. She hopes eventually to attend medical school and ultimately become a public advocate for these children.

— John Roberts
The summer before his senior year, **Teodor "Tedo" Simeonov** suddenly discovered that he had an unusual amount of power.

Wherever he worked, department heads and managers were at his beck and call. You see, Simeonov was an auditor for the South Carolina Office of the State Auditor.

"People pretty much have to do what you tell them to do," laughs Simeonov, whose nine-member team conducted several audits of state-funded agencies, including the University of South Carolina, where his specific duty was to scrutinize the financial records of the school’s athletic department. He also helped audit several school districts, the South Carolina Department of Agriculture and the State Ethics Commission.

The accounting major’s internship was supported by the Furman Advantage, a program in which the employer and Furman share the costs associated with the internship. "It could be really intense at times, but all of your work was checked and rechecked by other accountants," says Simeonov, a native of Bulgaria.

The previous summer, he helped audit several small non-profit agencies as an intern with Greene and Finney, LLP, a Greenville firm. As part of that internship he traveled the state with four other accountants, conducting audits of fire stations, police stations and small school districts. The workdays were long, with his calculator often running from 8 a.m. until 10 p.m.

The internship with Greene and Finney was funded through the Francis M. Hipp Internship Program. Named for a Furman alumnus and former Liberty Corporation chair, the program supports about 18 internships each year.

Simeonov says that the internships, particularly the one with the Office of the State Auditor, helped him “get a really good idea of how different aspects of a business all work together. The internships gave me real life experience, much different than class,” he says.

They also helped him clarify his professional interests, which are international business consulting and accounting.

Simeonov, who speaks four languages (Bulgarian, English, Russian and German), was introduced to Furman by Diana Dimitrova, a 1994 Furman graduate who was his American Studies teacher in Bulgaria.

Once he arrived, he quickly became a well-known figure on campus. As a part-time employee of Computing and Information Services, he helped many members of the faculty and staff with their computer problems. He also worked in the Admissions Office, conducting summer campus tours.

Since earning his Furman degree, Simeonov is off to a fast start on his career path as an employee of Elliot Deddorfer, LLC, a subsidiary of Elliott, Davis & Company, where he works in the international division. He provides consulting services to European-based automotive suppliers that do business with BMW and Michelin.

His talents seem to be a perfect match with the Upstate’s growing international business climate. He’s happy in Greenville and has enrolled in additional accounting classes at Clemson University. But he says that someday he may return to his native Bulgaria to put his business experience to work.

“There’s a world of opportunity out there,” he says.

— John Roberts
When Mollie Auran of Kent, Ohio, graduated from high school four years ago, she knew that she wanted to pursue a career in journalism. She wasn't so sure, however, about which college she should attend.

The University of Missouri, which has one of the finest journalism schools in the country, had offered her an attractive scholarship package. But she also firmly believed that Furman offered her something she couldn't get at Missouri.

"I decided to come to Furman because I didn't think a journalism degree would make me a smarter person," Auran says. "I felt like I couldn't start writing and learning how to be a journalist until I knew more about everything. And that's really why I came to Furman — to learn more about everything."

As it turned out, Auran's choice couldn't have been better. Not only did she get her liberal arts education, receiving a degree in communication studies and philosophy this spring, but her internship experiences ultimately landed her a job with the CBS News program "48 Hours," a position that would make any journalism graduate envious.

The course for Auran's career path was set in the spring of her freshman year. As part of an introductory philosophy class, she was required to observe a "real-world situation" and write a paper about how it related to what she had learned in class. Because she was interested in journalism, she chose to observe at WHNS-Fox 21, a Greenville television station.

As luck would have it, the station was looking for an undergraduate intern. So Auran went to work right away, editing tape for the weekend shows and doing whatever else was needed. She worked approximately 20 hours per week during the school year and put in 40-hour weeks during the summer.

After her sophomore year, she decided it was time to push the internship envelope. She visited Charles Brock, Furman's assistant dean for undergraduate research and internships, and perused his "internship bible" for the most "competitive" thing she could find — which turned out to be a summer internship with CBS News in New York.

Auran didn't have high hopes. More than 3,000 people applied for just a few spots, and she was competing against some of the best and brightest journalism students in the country. But few could match Auran's experience outside the classroom, and she got the call to go to New York.

"I had a better chance than I thought," she says. "After all, how many college students have worked at a professional TV station in one of the largest markets in the country?"

Auran was assigned to the news program "48 Hours," and her summer in New York was everything she hoped it would be. She met Dan Rather, saw Andy Rooney every day in the CBS cafeteria, and worked long, hectic hours during the coverage of the John F. Kennedy, Jr., plane crash. Several of the stories she helped research made it to the air.

CBS News was pleased with Auran's work. After she finished the 1999 fall term at Furman, she returned to New York over the holidays to help the network with its millennium show. And once she finished her degree requirements following winter term, she joined "48 Hours" full time as a member of the research and development staff.

"I feel my liberal arts background has given me a better understanding of the issues that are involved in the news," says Auran, who returned to campus for graduation exercises in May. "It prepared me well for what I'm doing now."

— Vince Moore
Throughout his four years at Furman, Ethan Friddle, who graduated this spring with a degree in religion, worked in a variety of intern and volunteer programs in preparation for a career in the ministry.

His assignments took him to the Billy Graham Training Center in Asheville, N.C., the Safe Harbor Shelter for Battered Women in Greenville and the Palmetto Emergency Boy’s Shelter. He pursued a number of other internships through Furman’s Church-Related Vocations program.

One CRV internship took him to United Ministries of Greenville, where he counseled prostitutes, drug addicts and troubled teen-agers, some of whom had been kicked out of their homes or removed by the Department of Social Services. Friddle found that one of the main difficulties in this internship was gaining the trust of those he tried to counsel; not everyone was interested in his advice or his attempts to minister to their needs.

Friddle also worked as a chaplain intern at the Palmetto Baptist Medical Center, where he counseled patients and family members. Many patients had no family — and again, some were more receptive to his offer of help than others. “You never knew what to expect,” he says. “Many of them were very ill, and sometimes I would return the next day and enter a room only to find an empty bed.”

Friddle was one of two Furman students chosen for a Duke Endowment internship in the summer of 1999. After working for a time at Endowment headquarters in Charlotte, N.C., Friddle moved to an urban Methodist church in Charlotte, where he served as a youth minister for a racially mixed group of children, adolescents and young adults. The program provided the residents of the area a safe, secure place to play and to grow. Friddle describes himself as a role model and, in some ways, a father figure for the younger boys and girls, many of whom had no father.

The group included a number of Cambodian-Americans who exposed Friddle to a different culture — and to the Buddhist faith. Of these young people, for whom he felt great admiration, he says, “They had a strong sense of honor and shame. They did not want to offend anyone.” He says this was especially evident when, even though they practiced a different faith, they attended the Methodist church services each Sunday.

Friddle encouraged his charges to become involved in their community and to participate in service projects by arranging for them to work on old houses or distribute canned goods. To him, this was an opportunity to have a positive influence on young people at an impressionable age.

Friddle says his internships introduced him to many different perspectives on life and the ministry, while increasing his understanding of people and heightening his interest in helping the less fortunate. As he says, “You can’t help others if you don’t know or understand where they are coming from.”

The son and grandson of ministers, Friddle, a native of Black Mountain, N.C., describes his internships as “motivational, because I dealt with these experiences in the present, not as some future activity. I could keep preparing myself for the ministry through personal study, but without being engaged in these activities, I don’t think I would be able to succeed.”

After returning to Black Mountain for a year, Friddle hopes to enroll in Princeton Theological Seminary and pursue a Master of Divinity degree.

— Lori Helms