

SBES-601-M01

Ethics and Social Responsibility

Professor William J. Lawrence

Linyun Xiong

0896225

lxiong01@nyit.edu

● Title of your article

For Interns, All Work and No Payoff

By ALEX WILLIAMS February 26, 2014

Like other 20-somethings seeking a career foothold, Andrew Lang, a graduate of Penn State, took an internship at an upstart Beverly Hills production company at age 29 as a way of breaking into movie production. It didn't pay, but he hoped the exposure would open doors.

When that internship proved to be a dead end, Mr. Lang went to work at a second production company, again as an unpaid intern. When that went nowhere, he left for another, doing whatever was asked, like delivering bottles of wine to 27 offices before Christmas. But that company, too, could not afford to hire him, even part time.

A year later, Mr. Lang is on his fourth internship, this time for a company that produces reality TV shows. While this internship at least pays him (he makes \$10 an hour, with few perks), Mr. Lang feels no closer to a real job and worries about being an intern forever. "No one hires interns," said Mr. Lang, who sees himself as part of a "revolving class of people" who can't break free of the intern cycle. "Is this any way to live?"

The intern glass ceiling isn't limited to Hollywood. Tenneh Ogbemudia, 23, who aspires to be a record executive, has had four internships at various New York media companies, including Source magazine and Universal Music Group.

“In any given month, I’d say I apply to at least 300 full-time jobs,” she said, noting these attempts were to no avail. “On the other hand, I can apply to one or two internship positions a month and get a call back from both.”

Call them members of the permanent intern underclass: educated members of the millennial generation who are locked out of the traditional career ladder and are having to settle for two, three and sometimes more internships after graduating college, all with no end in sight.

Like an army of worker ants, they are a subculture with a distinct identity, banding together in Occupy Wall Street-inspired groups and, lately, creating their own blogs, YouTube channels, networking groups and even a magazine that captures life inside the so-called Intern Nation.

It is a young, rudderless community that is still trying to define itself. “I’m just wondering at what point how many internships is too many,” said Lea, who received a master’s degree from Parsons, the New School for Design two years ago and aspires to work as a magazine art director. (She was allowed to use only her first name to avoid jeopardizing a current job application.) So far, her résumé has been limited to three internships — planning events for teenagers at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, compiling news clippings for a public relations agency in New York, and being the “fetch-the-coffee girl” at an art gallery.

While feeling trapped inside what she calls a “never-ending intern life,” Lea satisfies her creative impulses by editing a food and drinks column at a lifestyle blog, selling coral fan necklaces on Etsy, and starting a charity to teach children about “responsible” street art. She wonders if she should surrender to a fourth internship or settle for an office job outside her chosen field.

“I’m 26 right now,” she said. “I know that everyone has their own pace, but I don’t really feel like a real adult right now.”

There was a time not long ago when internships were reserved for college students. But that era is passing, with loosely defined internships — some paying a small stipend, some nothing — replacing traditional entry-level jobs for many fresh out of college.

The moribund economy is, without question, a primary factor behind the shift. Even though the employment picture has brightened since the depths of the Great Recession, few would describe it as sunny. The general unemployment rate inched

down to 6.6 percent last month, but the jobless rate for college graduates age 20 to 24 stood at 8 percent in 2013, compared with 5.1 percent in 2007, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

No one tracks how many college graduates take internships, but employment experts and intern advocates say the number has risen substantially in recent years. "The postgraduate internship has exploded," said Ross Perlin, author of the book "Intern Nation: How to Earn Nothing and Learn Little in the Brave New Economy." "This was something that became a real mainstream experience after the recession began."

But the poor job market is not the only reason that recent graduates feel stuck in internships. Millennials, it is often said, want more than just a paycheck; they crave meaningful and fulfilling careers, maybe even a chance to change the world.

That may explain why millennials like Breanne Thomas, 24, an aspiring entrepreneur in Brooklyn, has bounced from internship to internship. Unlike her parents' generation, it is not enough to find a steady job; she wants to follow the path of Mark Zuckerberg, or at least to get in on the ground floor of the next Facebook, the next Twitter.

"'Success' doesn't always mean financial success, but doing something you're passionate about," said Ms. Thomas, who graduated with two bachelor's degrees from the University of Oregon in 2012. "It's kind of my goal one day to have my own company, to be part of something that is going to do something great. That's why I'm in tech."

That kind of ambition comes with a price, however. Competition for salaried high-tech jobs is fierce, so Ms. Thomas has had to settle for internships: three, so far, including at a five-person food-delivery start-up, a beauty products site and, currently, a well-known social-networking app that she asked not to name.

While the idea of slaving away in two, three or four quasi jobs without a clear path for advancement may seem unimaginable to an older generation, those in their 20s seem to respond to their jobless fate with a collective shrug. To them, internships are the new normal. "For some people, being an accountant, taking a safe route, is perfectly fine, but that's not where my values lie," Ms. Thomas said.

This is especially true in more creative fields, whether it is filmmaking or publishing. "It's fashion," said Dawn Joyce, 24, when asked why she has gone through four internships since 2010. Those include unpaid stints at a major fashion magazine,

where she mingled with Zooey Deschanel and Julianne Moore at photo shoots, and at a public relations firm, where she held front-row seats for late-arriving celebrities like Selena Gomez. "I consider myself to be pretty jaded already."

"I have seen a lot of people beside me quit," Ms. Joyce added. "It's sort of like, 'Let's see who lasts the longest.'"

As their ranks have swelled, interns are beginning to see themselves as part of a special class, albeit one with few privileges and perks. They share their own brand of gallows humor, their own pride of purpose and their own battle-hardened worldview tinged with a risk-taker's optimism.

This intern-centric culture has spawned numerous blogs, a place at the multiplex (think of "The Internship," from last year, with Owen Wilson and Vince Vaughn playing a pair of 40-something Google interns) and even its own magazine.

Intern magazine, which came out in October, grew out of the frustrations of Alec Dudson, 29, a former intern who toiled in London's publishing industry. "I was working 30 hours a week at odd jobs, on top of 40 hours a week at internships, and I knew there wasn't a job at the end of it," said Mr. Dudson, who slept on friends' sofas to help make ends meet. "I needed to do something of my own."

That something turned out to be a glossy, biannual magazine that is geared for those with a design and creative bent, and looks like a fashion bible for the Black Book crowd. The feature articles provide tips and inspiration for the faceless drones who keep the style industries humming, including a first-person piece by a Spanish photographer who cut his teeth by interning for Richard Kern in New York.

"There is a culture of internships, a situation whereby it is completely normal for young people to think that working unpaid is just part of the process," Mr. Dudson said. "Nobody even questions it. I wasn't the only one confused about where the boundaries lie, how much of this stuff do you have to do before someone takes you seriously."

These days, there are no shortages of places, online and off, for interns to gather and commiserate. Groups like FindSpark, a New York jobs network for recent graduates, offer meetups and mixers with themes like "Find and Follow Your Passion" and "Your Personal Brand" that draw hundreds. Interns who tire of glad-handing their way through mixers with frozen smiles often vent their frustrations on anonymous blogs like Fashion Intern Problems, the short-lived Life of an Investment Banking

Summer Slave and, for Hollywood's version of Roman galley slaves, Anonymous Production Assistant Blog and Intern-Anonymous.

"I worked 32 hours a week and was treated like a minion," one commenter wrote on Intern-Anonymous. "I was then fired because they were afraid I would leak information."

Lately, however, long-suffering interns are starting to do more than complain. They point to the Labor Department's six criteria for legal internships, which stipulate that companies that do not pay interns must provide vocational education and refrain from substituting interns for paid employees, among others. Those rules have been highly open to interpretation and their enforcement is sporadic.

In a much-publicized lawsuit in 2011, two unpaid interns sued the filmmakers of "Black Swan" alleging a violation of federal and New York State minimum wage laws. Last June, a federal judge in New York ruled in favor of the interns. (The case is on appeal.)

"It's an institutionalized form of wage theft," said Eric Glatt, 44, one of the plaintiffs who has since helped form an Occupy-inspired group called Intern Labor Rights. Last year, the group distributed fake swag bags and buttons that read "Pay Your Interns" outside fashion shows in New York.

That ruling opened the floodgates to some 30 other lawsuits against companies like Warner Music Group, Elite Model Management and, perhaps most notably, Condé Nast. In that suit, one plaintiff, Lauren Ballinger, who interned at W while still in college, conjured visions of "The Devil Wears Prada" with her stories of toiling away on menial tasks like organizing jewelry for 12-hour shifts for a stipend that she claimed broke down to \$1 an hour.

While the plaintiffs in the Condé Nast suit had been students at the time of their internships, such lawsuits have sent a chill through the Intern Industrial Complex, affecting undergraduates and postgraduates alike as companies scramble to adjust to the new legal landscape.

Some, like NBC Universal, have responded by paying interns. Other former intern magnets are redefining the position (Gawker Media now calls its entry-level workers "editorial fellows").

In some cases, however, the intern revolt may be backfiring.

Last October, Condé Nast announced that it was ending the internship programs within its 25 magazines, which means that 20-something aspiring magazine editors will have one less place to get a toehold for their “meaningful” careers.

“Can you hear it?” one commenter wrote on a WWD article about the ending of internships. “It’s my dream of a Vogue internship going straight out the window.

- **Published source**

<http://archinect.com/news/article/93741317/for-interns-all-work-and-no-payoff>

- **Briefly describe the primary focus of the problem and how it was handled**

The reality is that it's not that hard to find a job if you're not being selective and extremely proactive about searching and networking.

The sad part is that I see myself adhering to the same value set as the majority of these individuals, seeking a job that will provide me the opportunity of participating in something rewarding and fulfilling.

Unfortunately, those are the jobs that are hard to find and the mediocre corporate ones leave you hollow and empty. So you are left with two options, choosing the less exciting job to survive or do amazing work and scrape by for a while.

- **Why did it attract your attention**

How about we all accept that the world is unfair and we are entitled to nothing, and that we are all left to fend for ourselves. For those who argue, "I have an education and a professional degree!" so does everyone else--that's the bare minimum. I am sure that among the sea of interns that end up in dead-end internships, there are the exceptional ones who climb out of the pit and into the light.

Why should we expect that because we pay our dues, and work hard, that someone is going to give us a job? There have been numerous (if not countless) articles on the poor state of internships, and no where does it mention those that make it out.

- **Do you think it was handled well and if not what would you have done.**
- I happen to accept the realities and inequalities of the world, and that if you're not going to change the way it spins, you change what you can to make it work for you. Most people will fall into the latter category. Working one unpaid internship (while not ideal and absolutely poor practice by the employer) that gets you a job later, great move...it worked out. Moving from one unpaid

internship to another--or even worse, a third--probably has more behind it than the system being broken.

- And I think few readers have taken into account how exactly serial interns are able to afford to do so. Trust fund? Mom and pop? Oh, poor interns...Or maybe they're not so poor after all. Everyone loves a good struggle story, but it's not newsworthy when they mention they have help.