

7. STUDENT LOAN

Colleges tout the value of internships. Many require internships as a part of academic programs. The pressure is so great that some students, believing internships essential to their future job prospects, seek even those without either academic credit or compensation. According to the College Employment Research Institute, three-fourths of college students will serve an internship during their undergraduate career, and up to half of those will be unpaid.

Advocates of internships claim that internships provide invaluable opportunities for students to learn about the world of work and to apply their learning in a real setting. They also note that some employers use internship programs to identify potential employees, hence improving students' prospects for jobs after college.

A growing number of people criticize the use of unpaid internships. They claim that students work without pay for a whole semester or even an entire year, not only earning no money, but also paying college tuition and sometimes paying for lodging away from home and college. *The Wall Street Journal* (28 January 2009) reported that some students paid thousands of dollars to external services to help locate internships. The article points out that less affluent students do not have such opportunities. Opponents of unpaid internships also point out that some academic institutions poorly conceive and supervise internships, and they get off cheaply by not having to provide specific instruction or to use campus facilities. When internships are not carefully constructed and supervised, host companies can exploit students with menial labor that is not worth the high price students pay in time, effort, and money. Critics of unpaid internships object to for-profit companies improving their bottom lines using these unpaid workers. Unpaid interns may take jobs away from paid workers.

The Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA), administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, sets forth criteria designed to protect unpaid interns from exploitation and to protect the U.S. labor force from displacement. Critics of unpaid internships question whether colleges and employers comply with these rules, noting that often the only rule followed is the granting of academic credit. When students serve internships without academic credit, even if located using college listings and resources, there is no oversight to assure any of the FLSA strictures are met.