



# NAC Executive Insights

## *“Get the kNACk” Podcast Series: Summary*

### Value of College Internship Programs in Construction – ‘Golden Nuggets’

#### Key Points

- College Internship Programs are a Win-Win-Win scenario: a win for the college student, a win for the contractor or owner employing the intern and a win for the university in having the program.
- Benefits for the student intern are the most important, providing real-world experience and technical skill development along with soft skills development and confidence building.
- Benefits to a contractor, design firm or owner organization are many, including talent pipeline development, a cost-effective intern workforce and fresh talent and perspectives.
- Benefits to the university include the opportunity to assist the students in gaining practical industry experience, and aid in recruiting top new students and building a strong network and relationships with participating organizations.

#### Introduction

This Executive Insight summarizes the major points (“Golden Nuggets”) from two NAC (National Academy of Construction) “Get The kNACK” podcast episodes on the “Value of College Internship Programs in Construction”.

The insights offered here come from podcast episodes with NAC members and their student guests, where each student is an NAC scholarship recipient:

- Elie Homsy and his guest Daisy Dominguez-Hooper – California State Polytechnic University-Pomona, School of Construction Engineering and Management
- Sam Ariaratnam and his guest Mackenzie Schmader - Arizona State University, School of Sustainable Engineering and the Built Environment

Links to the podcasts with each of these episodes are listed in the For Further Information section. Readers are encouraged to listen to the complete podcasts.

The 'Golden Nuggets' are summarized below in three stakeholder categories:

1. Value of College Internship Programs – Student Perspective
2. Value of College Internship Programs – University Perspective
3. Value of College Internship Programs – Contractor/Owner Perspective

## **Value of College Internship Programs – Student Perspective**

1. Extremely valuable to gain real-world experience and technical skill development. The opportunity to put classroom work into real-world field experience. Put your learning to use and see how the real-world works.
2. The confidence gained and development of soft skills, i.e., communication and team dynamics, may be even more valuable.
3. Thinking about the end game – multiple internship opportunities help the student to define and identify what they like and dislike about different jobs in the industry.
4. Develop time management skills - the ability to balance time commitments and balance multiple assignments at the same time: internship – school – extracurricular school activities.
5. Prioritization skills and the ability to set boundaries.
6. Connections and networking – networking experiences are valuable and the ability to build a network.
7. Opportunity – say yes to every opportunity. Take advantage of every opportunity offered. Look at them as learning opportunities.
  - Take advantage of the opportunity to travel and work on challenging projects.
8. Gaining work experience teaches you to handle multiple challenges.
9. Multiple internships:
  - Build on knowledge – with multiple internships the ability to apply the knowledge learned from one project to a new project. The ability to understand the context of the knowledge learned to be able to apply effectively to a new project, new location, new organization, etc.
  - Provides more practical experience and different opportunities to understand how the industry works. This also moves the intern up the learning curve as they enter the work force.
  - Provides the intern the opportunity to sample different jobs and even industries. Helps you understand the construction industry and where you may best fit in the industry.
  - Allows you to understand what a work schedule is all about, how it can change from project to project and you learn what it feels like to be busy.
10. Sense of accomplishment - interns gain the experience of accomplishment when working on a project and as part of a team.
11. Very valuable that the company has a plan and goals for each intern.
12. Very encouraging on how much the school supports the internship program.

13. Both interns encourage students to be active in extra-curricular student organizations and activities. These organizations offer connections and inroads for job opportunities. In fact, the interest for one of our interns was sparked through involvement with the CMAA student chapter.
  - Allows you to connect and make friends with people who have similar interests where you can learn from peers and share/discuss different opportunities.

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*Take Advantage of Every Opportunity*

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### **Value of College Internship Programs - University Perspective**

1. The university needs a dedicated full-time position to effectively run the internship program.
  - Attract good companies to the program and match with student intern needs.
  - Tailor career fairs with specific needs and focus on construction roles. This takes the noise and distraction away and lets the student focus on companies interested in construction programs.
2. ASU provides OSHA 30 training to all intern students during sophomore year, prior to taking on internship assignments. This may be a best practice for other internship programs to develop.
3. Internships complement the education process by providing practical on-the-job industry experience – able to provide 100% job placement for all students.
  - Gives students the opportunity to understand what they are studying with real-world applications. A big part of the academic program is not only what they learn in the classroom, but what they learn in the field.
4. A major benefit is that the intern student has a more advanced understanding on how to work in industry going into their first job.
5. Build strong relationships with participating construction industry organizations and build the reputation of providing a new talent pipeline
  - Former students return as the best recruiters and advocates for the program.
6. 'Test Drive' - internship program allows both the company and student to 'test drive' the job or student to ensure a proper fit moving forward.
7. Job Placement:
  - Allows the student to select a company that they are comfortable with.
  - Students with intern experience are able to advance more quickly up the career ladder early in their first job.
8. Success of internship program – aids in recruiting new top students.
9. Win-win-win: win for the student intern, win for the participating construction organizations and a win for the university.

10. ASU has expanded the internship program as an optional program at the graduate school level. The result is more student talent with usable experience and skills ready for the construction industry.

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*Education is About Putting Your Student in  
a Position for Success*

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### **Value of College Internship Programs – Contractor/Owner Perspective (Employer)**

1. Internship program essentially results in a 3-6 month test run (essentially a 3-6 month interview) to identify the capabilities of the student intern and to determine how the student may fit in the organization long-term. Longer term internship assignments provide greater benefit to both the student intern and the company. Longer internships:
  - Gives the student a more in depth and significant experience and potentially the opportunity to rotate between different assignments and gain a broader exposure for their future career.
  - Provides a better return to the employer on the time spent training the student.
2. It is very important as a leader to find new talent, develop and mentor that talent and then grow that talent. Internship programs are a very vital part of the overall talent acquisition process at many companies.
3. The construction industry is all about people – we need to hire the right people, develop them and retain them.
4. Internship programs are a great screening process to observe new talent. Try it out for 3-6 months and see if it is the right fit for the company and the student. It is a cost-effective work force, offering fresh talent to the organization.
5. The program provides valuable learning experiences, career advancement opportunities, and provides the student intern the chance to contribute to the success of the company. Interns learn the value of work and understand the difference between theory and practice.
6. Assign a mentor to each intern. The mentor is a seasoned leader who provides career development guidance and encouragement to the intern. The mentor can challenge the intern to set higher goals for themselves and open their minds to what they can truly do.
7. Provide interns opportunities to engage and participate on professional networking. Align interns with professional construction organizations that match their career aspirations.
8. Networking is very valuable at all levels, especially for interns. As the leader, you need to build in these networking opportunities; it does not just happen.
9. Encourage interns to participate in multiple internships. Opportunity to try different areas of construction to see what they like. Interns get the taste of the life they will be living.
10. Encourage interns to be open to bigger opportunities and new assignments. Consider travel and relocation as opportunities if they are available.

11. Job Placement: suggest the best candidate to hire is the candidate with intern experience with your company. Next best candidate is the candidate with some intern experience. The least appealing candidate is someone with no intern experience. Typically much easier to on-board a new employee with intern experience versus no intern experience.
12. Every construction organization is encouraged to have an internship program.

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*Hire Good People and Nurture Them*

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## Conclusion

It takes a lot of work and effort from the university, student and construction organizations to run an effective Internship program. Internships complement the education process by providing the student practical on-the-job experience which prepares them for entry into the construction industry. Bottom line college internships programs are a Win-Win-Win scenario: A win for the college student, a win for the contractor or owner employing the intern and a win for the university in having the program.

## For Further Information

Readers are encouraged to listen to the complete podcasts listed below.

### “Get The kNACK” Podcasts:

- Value of College Internship Programs in the Construction Industry with Elie Homsy and Daisy Dominguez-Hooper  
<https://www.naocon.org/knack-episode/s4e4-the-value-of-college-internship-programs-in-the-construction-industry/>
- Value of Internship Programs – University and Student Perspectives with Sam Ariaratnam and Mackenzie Schmader  
<https://www.naocon.org/knack-episode/s5-e9-value-of-student-internships-student-and-university-perspectives-with-sam-ariaratnam-and-mackenzie-schmader/>

## About the Author

Jerry Eyink was elected to NAC in 2011. He spent his working career with Anheuser-Busch Inc., retiring as the Group Director—Project Management and Planning for the Engineering Group. He received his engineering degree from Purdue University and his MBA from Saint Louis University. The Academy honored him with its Richard L. Tucker Outstanding Service Award in 2022 for his continuous support to NAC.

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