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Kim Hill  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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## Internships More Important Than Ever, Says HR Exec Cummins '05

Oct. 2, 2013

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— As Illinois Wesleyan University students gathered in clusters near The Horton Group's table at Tuesday's Internship Fair, Katie (Simpkins) Cummins '05 looked on in approval.

"It's a very competitive marketplace today, and it's almost expected that a new college graduate looking for work has completed at least one internship, if not more," said Cummins. "An internship experience can make the difference between a good candidate and a great candidate."

Cummins should know. She's director of human resources at The Horton Group, one of the largest privately held insurance brokers in the nation. Cummins joined more than 50 other employers at this year's Internship Fair, the 23rd annual event.

The Illinois Wesleyan alumna, who was an intern herself less than a decade ago, brings a unique perspective. As a student, Cummins took the advice of then-internship coordinator Ann Harding (now director of alumni relations), who suggested that she apply for an HR internship at Bloomington-based Afni.

"It was my first experience in HR," recalled Cummins, a psychology major who was hired by Afni after she graduated in 2005. "My whole HR career started with that internship. Had I not had it, who knows if HR would have been the field I would have gone into?"

Now Cummins directs HR functions for Horton's 300 employees. Last year she and several colleagues restarted Horton's internship program, creating two slots for interns in the company's Sales and Marketing Division. Wesleyan finance major Michael Heaton '14 filled one of those positions this year. Cummins was at the Internship Fair on Tuesday to recruit for the summer 2014 program at the company's Orland Park, Ill. headquarters.

Students at Illinois Wesleyan are increasingly appreciative of the opportunities internships provide. Last year, 481 students completed internships, a four percent increase over the previous year, according to Laurie Diekhoff, assistant director/internship coordinator at the Hart Career Center.



Brad Bullington '15 talks with Katie Cummins '05, director of human resources at The Horton Group, during the IWU Internship Fair.

In addition to gaining skills and career-related experience, internships give students the opportunity to explore possibilities of future careers. For Cummins, that benefit gives her greater satisfaction than the fresh ideas and perspectives the interns bring to The Horton Group.

“Many times this past summer I met with the interns to talk about things not only specific to Horton, but related to their career and life goals,” said Cummins. “An internship should not only be a learning opportunity for specific skills, but also an opportunity for students to figure out what they want to do with their careers. We’re happy to have supported that process.”

*Contact: **Kim Hill**, (309) 556-3960*