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Internships Provide Experiential Learning Opportunities for Students Like Diehl

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— In case anyone still believes an internship is about fetching coffee for the full-time employees, Emily Diehl '17 is here to set you straight.

A business administration major at Illinois Wesleyan University, Diehl is a marketing account executive intern at Progressive Impressions International (pii), a Bloomington-based direct mail marketing provider. She's held the internship for more than a year, working on the special projects team. In her first few weeks on the job, Diehl's supervisor asked her to conduct research on a potential client, a task ordinarily completed by an account executive.

"My boss found I have a knack for research, so that's become my primary focus," Diehl said of her responsibilities. In fact, Diehl's investigation of consumer trends in the auto industry led to the invitation to help train the company's account directors on how to market a new product.

"It was very interesting to be 15 years younger than a lot of the professionals in the room, giving them a step-by-step guide on how to market this new product," said Diehl, a native of Atkinson, Ill.



Emily Diehl '17

Employers regard such teamwork and communication skills as vital. In the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) [Job Outlook 2016 Spring Update](#), employers regarded four competencies — critical thinking/problem solving, professionalism/work ethic, teamwork, and communication skills — to be "essential" and "absolutely essential" in the college graduates they are looking to hire.

Internships offer students opportunities to demonstrate their abilities to work in teams, to problem solve, and to present their ideas orally and in writing. Diehl successfully exhibited all of these attributes about eight months into the job when she was tasked with managing a company pitch for new business. With account executives and her boss out of the office for the day, Diehl served as project manager between account executives in the company's Florida office and a graphic designer on Diehl's team, ironing out details on the proposal's due date. "It was an awesome feeling to be in charge of a project that big, to have it completed on time, and to have everyone be happy with the end result," said Diehl.

With Illinois Wesleyan's curriculum focused on creativity, critical thinking and effective communication, Diehl said her coursework has prepared her well for success.

She said her most significant takeaway from her internship has been the opportunity to "live the concepts we are taught in the classroom, and then taking those concepts above and beyond." She said she is well-versed in SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of any company she's researching. "There's nothing like doing it for a real company rather than a classroom exercise, yet you have to be taught how to do it in the classroom. No employer wants to take the time to teach it to you."

This fall semester nearly 80 students are interning at 49 different locations. Many employers take part in the university's annual [Internship Fair](#), where Diehl first met representatives from pii. Illinois Wesleyan students reported [interning](#) at 240 locations last academic year, and 66 percent of recent graduates had at least one internship experience — just one example of experiential learning opportunities for students at Illinois Wesleyan.

"Quality internships, like Emily's, provide students with a chance to put their liberal arts education to use in a real-world work environment while gaining some of the 'career-ready' skills that employers value in future hires," said Laurie Diekhoff, associate director for career engagement at the [Hart Career Center](#). "We are thankful for organizations like pii who take extra steps to ensure interns have opportunities to learn, grow and contribute."



Emily Diehl '17 (right) first interned at Progressive Impressions International in summer 2015 along with classmate Cam Weber '16.



Cassie Collins '11 (right), an HR generalist at Progressive Impressions International, talks with Tia Sims '17 at the Illinois Wesleyan annual Internship Fair.