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Interns Start Work During Busy Accounting Season

Jan. 11, 2017

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— While their classmates enjoyed a few more days of winter break, 17 Illinois Wesleyan University [accounting](#) majors stepped into the work force as paid interns with public accounting firms.

Over the past decade more than 200 students have participated in Illinois Wesleyan’s unique and popular [winter internship program](#), which allows students to work alongside full-time CPA associates during the firms’ busy seasons and stay on track to finish their Illinois Wesleyan coursework in four years.

“Students at other universities often take a full semester off just to intern,” said Laurie Diekhoff, associate director for career engagement at the [Hart Career Center](#). “At Illinois Wesleyan, our program is designed to allow students to experience a 10-week full-time internship for academic credit, then return to campus for five weeks of intensive classes before the semester ends, so students get a full four units of credit for the semester.” The five weeks of accounting classes are affectionately called “boot camp” within the accounting department. Taking “boot camp” courses allows students to stay on track to complete the 150 hours of university course credits in order to register for the CPA exam, rather than taking five years to complete those credits, which is common at many other universities.

That structure was instrumental in Gail Mar’s decision to attend Illinois Wesleyan. Knowing she planned to major in accounting, Mar (Northbrook, Ill.) talked with students at other universities who would need a full five years to graduate. “Here we can graduate in four years and complete a prestigious, paid internship, so that flexibility really had an impact on my decision to attend Illinois Wesleyan,” said Mar, who is interning at PwC in Chicago.

In addition to PwC, Illinois Wesleyan students are interning at the other Big Four professional services networks that perform the majority of the world’s auditing services. These include Deloitte, EY and KPMG. Mid-level firms and Fortune 500 companies participate in the winter internship program as well.

This semester the public firm of RSM selected eight Illinois Wesleyan students for its internship program. Colin Gogoel of Elgin, Ill., will work in audit at RSM. Although he had taken accounting in high school and enjoyed it, Gogoel came to Illinois Wesleyan as a business major unsure of a career path.

After earning high grades in “Accounting for Decision Making II,” however, Gogoel’s professor encouraged him to strongly consider an accounting major.

“The winter internship program was significant for me to declare the accounting major,” Gogoel said. “I don’t like uncertainty, so this major was very appealing to me in terms of having direction.”

At the end of the 10-week internship, Gogoel said he will know whether public accounting is the right fit for him. “Having the opportunity to work in the industry before I graduate is huge for me,” said Gogoel. “I will have a sense of direction for my career.”

He may have more than a sense of direction. Jerry Olson, chair of accounting and financial services, said winter accounting interns generally receive full-time offers from their organizations at the end of the program.

[Matt LaLonde ’14](#) was one of those students receiving an offer at the end of his internship in 2013. LaLonde interned with KPMG and was even selected for KPMG LLP’s Global Internship Program, working for several weeks as part of the U.S. Tax desk at KPMG’s Paris office.

“The winter internship program is “Busy Season 101,” where you learn things about real life and having a real job that aren’t taught in college,” said LaLonde, who is now based in Chicago as a senior associate, State and Local Tax at KPMG U.S. “The classroom is a safe environment to become familiar with new concepts, but it’s outside the classroom where you’re forced to juggle, balance and multi-task your way through the learning process, and that’s where the real growth begins.” The winter internship program is a chance to test-drive a career, he added.

“The combination of strong academic talent and quality internship experiences prepare Illinois Wesleyan accounting graduates for success,” said Diekhoff. Illinois Wesleyan accounting graduates repeatedly have among the highest pass rates on the CPA exam of any accounting program in the state of Illinois.



Colin Gogoel (left) and Gail Mar are two of the students interning now with public accounting firms.



Chair and Professor of Accounting Jerry Olson explains the high CPA exam pass rate by Illinois Wesleyan accounting students.



Accounting majors at Illinois Wesleyan have the opportunity to work alongside full-time CPA associates during the firms’ busy seasons.