

College students must prepare for the 'real world'

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Written by

Corinna Muntean

Guest Columnist

Graduation can be an exciting and scary time — having to look for a job and wondering if student loans will ever be paid off.

In April, I will be obtaining a bachelor's degree in communication with a minor in journalism. Every parent's dream is to see their children do better than they did. Every day since elementary school, when my teachers told me to attend college, I always wondered if my schooling would be a good return on the investment.

So my friend Marissa Weber and I are making a documentary titled Making the Transition: Higher Education to Workforce. Parents and students need to know whether higher education institutions are preparing students for the real world. Weber and I plan on interviewing college students, college graduates, professors, internship directors, intern supervisors and experts in the field. The documentary will be done by the spring of 2014.

The goal for the documentary is to raise awareness about the topic and help us build our portfolios. Both of us would like to enter the documentary in film festivals and get the movie in theaters.

In order to do better than the previous generation, students need to gain at least one year of relevant experience prior to graduation. Internships and co-ops can help students learn about the corporate culture and gain real life skills. It also allows students to apply the theories that they may have learned in the classroom. Even though the vast majority of students work, students can still get involved in internships that take place on-campus, such as being a radio personality.

During my academic career at Oakland University, I was an intern at WXOU radio and Rick Young & Associates. My internships taught me to be concise, open-minded, never say no to an assignment and to take initiative. Doing the bare minimum or being pessimistic won't get anyone a job, a promotion or a positive review from a reference.

Still being frightened about graduation, I decided to apply for another internship. Yet again, I chose to be in another field. A friend of mine recommended a public relations internship at the Birmingham Bloomfield Chamber. Even though I have been here for just over a month, my co-workers have taught me a lot — how to edit pictures, develop a social media strategy, compose a proper e-mail and write press releases.

Since four-year degrees are becoming the norm, college students must do something that sets them apart. Employers want someone who can do more than just achieve excellent grades. So get involved in student organizations and take on leadership roles. Or job shadow someone, study abroad and complete a significant amount of volunteer work. After completing internships and joining a student organization, graduation doesn't feel so scary.

One internship alone won't guarantee anyone a job. Every college student should take relevant courses and visit Career Services to get resumes revised, prepared for interviews and hear about upcoming events. The job market is competitive and no one will spoon feed students. If college graduates want to be prepared for the workforce, that responsibility is on them.