**My Internship Story + Advice for CIS Undergrads**

Hi all,

I really would just like to share what I’ve learned at my current internship. To introduce myself, I’m currently an upcoming junior in IS&T. I changed my major around the beginning of sophomore year from philosophy/economics. As a child, I always liked fiddling around with computers. I never really got into programming software, but I knew how to edit snips of codes from building games. This also gave me a decent introduction to computer networking.

So around December of last year, I decided to just mess around one day and apply for some internships. This was also right around the time I joined Temple’s ACM. I applied to a whole range of companies from SAP to even Microsoft. This wasn’t so much a serious decision as it was a mark of curiosity because at the time the only classes I had under my belt were 1048, java 1, databases, and operating systems; having said that, I did have a decent GPA and lots of help from the mentorship program with Wendy Urban and Rose McGinnis. (which I suggest you enroll in if you’re serious about getting internships) Also, not to advertise for joining the ACM but it does come in handy when interview day comes.

Okay, so now for the good stuff. To my surprise, I was called around February about an internship for Astrazeneca that I applied for. I had absolutely no idea what to expect and to be honest I didn’t even remember applying there. I vaguely remember finding the internship via Google. So for some company background for those of you have never heard of Astrazeneca before; it is a global pharmaceutical company that is based out of London and Stockholm.

Over the phone I was told that I needed to schedule a phone interview and a possible in-person interview if I were to move on to the next stage. I scheduled the interview and began to seek out help because after hanging up the phone, I had an overwhelming feeling of ‘what now?’. To begin, I used Google’s omniscient search engine to find practice phone interview questions. I then consulted Rose and Wendy who had some interesting tips such as:

1. Stand Up when you talk on the phone, it boosts your voice and shows you have confidence..It also keeps you from getting distracted somewhat (depending on who you are)  
2. Have a sheet of paper that has some basic stuff about the company you’re applying for. (Locations, Headquarters, CEO’s Name, # of employees, and what the company is known for.  
3. Also make sure to keep a pen around so you can jot down notes or names.  
4. Take your time! There is no rush and the people on the other line are just as human as you.  
5. Act professional, don’t use swears or curses at all. (this should go without saying)  
6. If you’re going to be nervous, go over the practice questions multiple times. A lot of these questions are just behavioral based.

The day of my phone interview finally arrived, I’ll be honest, I was quite on end. I was introduced to 2 lovely people who are now my intern coordinators. We had some small talk then it was right into the interview questions. They started off with easy stuff, ‘how long will you be able to work, when can you start, why should we hire you?’ Whenever you have questions about yourself, try to be modest but do explain good reasons as to why they should pick you over others. After that, they went into more complicated questions like, ‘what are your strengths and weaknesses, talk about a project you did that didn’t go as planned.. what happened, what did you learn?’  
Use anything you’d like, I used a group project from one of my IS&T classes. Don’t feel afraid to mention things if you think they’re silly in contrast to the ‘corporate’ world; however, saying that you turned in a final or homework is not going to fly. Companies love big group work and you taking a leadership role in anything. This is where joining the ACM comes into play, because if you actually contribute then it counts as leadership and another reason why they should pick you over the next person. Looking back on it all, it seems companies are more willing to hire individuals with prior internship experience, but if you can make a good case for your potential, I see no reason as to why you can’t get the internship.

After a couple weeks, I was notified that I had passed my phone interview and that I needed to schedule an in-person interview. Now this was the real daunting task, I just got an interview to a company I had no idea I applied to, and even worse, I have to prove myself to people who do programming/implementation for a living! My advice, don’t fret, upon coming here I’ve learned a lot of valuable nuances.

1. Not everyone who works in an IT field came from an IT background. There are absolutely tons of people here who picked it up along the way and came from backgrounds in finance, engineering, chemistry, biology, you name it.  
2. Not everyone programs, actually, here’s a very big misconception I need to point out. Sorry for you CS kids, (not really though because you can get the same jobs as IS&T pretty much) but, most companies who are not software companies themselves do NOT program in-house. Rather, they outsource it because it’s much faster and they get people in-house to manage these programs, or make edits to the code where they are needed. You also have to get in the habit of being able to sell things to your superiors, how will it save the company money and the potential of ROI’s (return of investments) This also is another reason for outsourcing apps because if it’s under contract the company has someone else to blame for it.  
3. The corporate world is actually a lot slower than things you are used to in high-school or college. If you work for a big company, you often have to go through many hoops to actually get anything done. Most projects aren’t implemented until maybe 1-2 years after their project proposal. This includes a lot of fluff meetings and phone-calls just to make sure everyone didn’t ‘forget’ about the project.

As I did before, I just Googled popular interview questions and studied up on my company’s history. I also made sure I had answers to where you have to talk about group work, your personal projects, and leadership contributions. When the day of my interview arrived, I found out that I was to be interviewed by three Information Solutions Managers. Depending on who your company is, having multiple interviewees might be a normal occurrence. As always, get up to give your peers a handshake and acknowledge who you are. Be firm, keep a straight posture, and turn your phone OFF.

There was some background given at first about the question structure. They had some fancy acronym for it, but basically it was a bunch of stock questions where you had to give a basic rundown of what the project entitled, what you learned, how could it be improved, how could you have improved, and last but not least, what was your leadership role. I don’t have much advice here because 3 people interviewing you is a complicated thing. They have time to prepare another question while you’re still trying to answer the first. My only advice is to once again, take your time, if you mess up a question or feel like there is a better example, DO NOT hesitate to tell them that.

So, after a long couple of months I finally had received word that I was being offered employment at a very, very good pay rate. Let me tell you, I was bummed that my summer was being taken away from me; however, you should also realize that having this amount of money for the upcoming semester is pretty much a summer in itself. And it’s not just limited to pay, the earlier you get your internship, the more of a chance you have to getting a really, really nice one come the end of your university career. Maybe you’ll even be offered a job after doing whatever internship.

Lastly, I wanted to just go over some things I’m learning here. We have 2 main objectives in our internship: 1. you’re paired with a manager who administrates one specific area of the business and 2. you must also meet with the other IS interns and come up with a presentation that will be presented in front of 50-150 people of the department. So for my one area of study, I am currently researching implementations within IBM’s Datapower. Datapower is a fancy router that routes XML and web based traffic through it much more efficiently for Software-as-a-Service architecture. You’ll come to see that a lot of companies that outsource technology have moved toward this type of system architecture… eventually even moving their whole systems to the cloud. So for my presentation, I selected the topics of cloud computing and virtualization. It’s a really cool topic because basically my plan was to host all the Astrazeneca operating system profiles in the cloud and maintain them from afar. This kind of thing enables employees to buy Macs if they so choose, or any other pc. Effectively, to log into a company’s Virtual-Private-Network all one would have to do is boot up the other operating system. This also extends the PC lifecycle since the software is being crunched in the cloud.

If this sounds too complicated, I thought so too. My classes at Temple University prepared me sufficiently, but not in regards to content. From what I’ve learned, Universities are good for testing your ability to jump through hoops. If you can pick up something and learn it (programming language, application delivery. Exc.) that’s all you need. My boss has literally taught me all I needed to know about XML, XSLTS, Back-end & front-end networking, database optimization, SOA and SOAP in the course of 2 months. I’m very excited to be here and I’m continuing to learn to this day. It’s funny though because I apparently have to take more ‘programming’ classes to go onto the IS&T course that teaches XML/SOA.

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed my story. I wanted to just share my experiences going from college to corporate. If you have any questions or need help with anything, let me know! I’d be absolutely glad to help you out, or direct you to someone who will know how to help you.

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