

# IMPACT



University of Idaho  
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## Building Student Internships with the Pacific Northwest Apparel & Textiles Consortium

### *The Situation*

Textiles and Clothing programs in land-grant universities in the Northwest recommend internships to give students in-depth experiences in the field. However, there are two problems. First, each textiles and clothing program in the region organizes its own student internship program independently of the others, duplicating effort and resources. Second, the range of available internships is limited. Large retailers such as JCPenney and The Gap have developed competitive internship programs, in part because of the recruitment and training cost savings of these efforts. Approximately one-half of the 300 Textiles and Clothing students enrolled in regional programs are interested in retail merchandising positions. The remaining students are interested in design, manufacturing, or product development positions. However, most apparel manufacturers in the Northwest do not offer internships. In 2000, there were 140 members of the Northwest Sewn Products Association (NSPA), a trade association that addressed the unique needs of sewn-products manufacturers and suppliers in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Of these, only Nike, Adidas, Eddie Bauer, and REI offered internships on a regular basis.

At the same time, Northwest apparel manufacturers are frustrated by their apparent inability to find qualified graduates to fill their positions. When a

match is not made between qualified graduates and jobs, firms find it difficult to grow and compete in a global marketplace. When graduates take positions out of their fields of expertise, they do not contribute to the state and regional economy to their fullest potential. How can Textiles and Clothing programs coordinate their efforts and offer a broader range of internship possibilities to students in order to match them with their ideal jobs?

### *Our Response*

In a regional effort, Textiles and Clothing faculty from the University of Idaho, Oregon State University, Central Washington University, and Washington State University applied for matching funds from a USDA Challenge Grant with the title *University and Industry Partnership: Pacific Northwest Apparel and Textiles Consortium*. Together we are attempting to solve this dilemma in three ways.

1. We are creating a joint internship directory, so that all of our students have access to information about all currently available internship opportunities and how to apply for them.
2. With our linkages to the NSPA, we are inviting area apparel manufacturers who do not currently offer internships to consider the possibility.



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Student scholarship money has been set aside to fund just such efforts. In other words, an employer can experiment with a student internship without incurring direct out-of-pocket salary expenses. In addition, we have developed an employer internship handbook with suggestions on how to structure a successful internship.

3. We are building a web site, which contains the internship directory, a registration page for companies that wish to add their internships to the directory, and linkages to other sources of information about opportunities in the Northwest apparel industry. Visit [www.its.uidaho.edu/pnwc](http://www.its.uidaho.edu/pnwc) for this site-in-progress.

### ***Program Outcomes***

The project will achieve cost savings for Northwest sewn products employers and potentially higher salaries for university graduates. Recruitment and training costs can be prohibitive for small companies (that employ less than 50 people). Attending the University of Idaho/Washington State University Career Expo can cost more than \$1,000 alone. Most small firms cannot afford to take employees away from the work at hand to attend such events. Advertising for positions in the local paper is rarely effective in drawing a pool of qualified applicants.

By contrast, one of the best ways to identify and hire qualified employees is through internships. Employers can train and observe an intern in action and the intern gains valuable experience while learning about the company. Often interns are hired directly from the internship or immediately after graduation. Creating a regional on-line internship directory is the most efficient way to match interns with potential employers.

By funding the first year or two of new internships with scholarships, the savings to state and regional firms is magnified. For example, if a regional firm, like Coldwater Creek, hired two interns funded by two \$2,000 scholarships, the firm would save \$4,000 plus recruiting expenses. If these interns were successful, the firm may invest those \$4,000 salary

savings into future internship salaries. Coldwater Creek will save money by reducing recruitment expenses and will experience fewer turnovers because the right person was hired for the job. Because the graduate has proven ability, s/he can command a starting salary that corresponds to education and experience.

**The Future:** The duration of this project is three years with a one-year no-cost extension, ending in November 2001. The internship directory is completed and students are currently identifying and securing summer internship opportunities. For summer 2000, OSU distributed seven student intern awards for \$1,000 each with Mervyn's California, JCPenney, Jantzen, Madison Brown, Akimbo, and Jessica McClintock. UI scholarships were distributed in May 2001 for internships at Coldwater Creek, Polo Ralph Lauren Factory Store, and Fred Meyer. The web site as a whole will be completed in October 2001.

### ***For More Information***

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