

exposure



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Perspectives on Experienced-Based Learning

Amy E. Schelemanow, with Lisa Vasaturo and Michael Peres

Whether they're called internships, work-studies, or co-ops, experienced-based learning opportunities provide on-the-job training for those in professional courses of study. Comparable in theory to apprenticeship programs for contemporary skilled trades and the centuries-old European tradesmen and laborer guild practices, work-study assignments place students into temporary full- or part-time positions in their field in order for them to learn by doing and be mentored by experienced professionals. The blending of practical and theoretical knowledge gained through work-study offers a critical advantage for students seeking experience in their careers and for employers seeking seasoned new-hires.

Having been involved in both sides of the practice as educator and sponsor/employer, I approached SPE about presenting a dialogue that considers the role and goals of experiential learning today. I asked Lisa Vasaturo, program coordinator for the office of Cooperative Education and Career Services at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) to talk with me on the topic. Lisa suggested we also call on Michael Peres, associate chair of the School of Photographic Arts and Sciences at RIT, to join us.

Within the following discussion we use three terms almost interchangeably when referring to experience-based learning:

Co-op is the common abbreviation of a "cooperative education experience," which at RIT is a full-time paid immersion work experience completed as a requirement for a degree. RIT is called a "co-op school" in our discussion, and from its inception many of its technical programs have required co-ops. RIT's academic calendar historically has been structured in ten-week quarters rather than semesters in order to accommodate ten-week co-ops. RIT will be making the transition to semesters in the 2013–2014 academic year.

Internship traditionally refers to an unpaid work experience that is credit-bearing.

Work-Study is a more general term that refers to a co-op and/or internship experience.

—Amy E. Schelemanow

Amy Schelemanow: RIT has always had experience-based learning at the core of its photography programs, but nationally the numbers of these kinds of programs are high as well. In 2011 *The New York Times* reported that seventy-five percent of full-time students nationally work as an intern before graduation. I am curious if that is the experience here at RIT? Is your percentage that high?

Lisa Vasaturo: RIT is one of the oldest and largest co-op schools in the country. So even though in SPAS (School of Photographic Arts and Sciences) everyone isn't required to do an internship or a co-op, I would say that more than seventy-five percent do participate in at least one. Perhaps students do so because they are heavily encouraged to, but they also recognize that these experiences are necessary to their future success.

Michael Peres: At SPAS we offer two degrees—a bachelor of science degree and a bachelor of fine arts. What we call a "co-op" is what would be considered a paid internship. The BS degree requires all students to do one. Without that they will not get certified: they won't receive their degree.

The terms for co-ops and internships might vary as you go to different schools, and we talk about them differently with parents. The word "work-study" is something parents and students can get their heads around without having to go to Webster's Dictionary. If you

Relieve
the red.
Refresh
your eyes.



Student: Brandyn Balch, RIT, Biomedical Photographic Communications. HostClient: Imaging Intern for Martino Flynn, Rochester, NY. Assignment: Collaborate with copywriting intern to develop slogan and ad layout for eyedrop line. Photo: Yellowstone National Park, July 2012. Layout: October 2012

say co-op, ninety-nine percent of the people don't think, "internship." They don't even use the word co-op because it's not in their vocabulary. I don't know if it's a "unique-to-RIT" word, but it's alien to parents and students, and most need to be oriented to the concept.

LV: It is really only likely to be a common term at the co-op schools across the country, like Northeastern, University of Cincinnati, Drexel. That's where you're going to hear "co-op." And that's the difference that I think we have at RIT. We are one of the oldest and largest co-op programs in the country, and we have a significant support system built into our administration here, more structured and robust than there might be at a school that doesn't have that history and core of their educational structure and philosophy.

AS: I can see it from the side of having hired interns for Eastman House, and I had really fulfilling experiences mentoring them, seeing them gain workplace experience, and fostering their advancement of skills and building great portfolios of their work. I understand it from that point of view. What about from the academic side?

MP: In the classroom, you deal almost exclusively in hypotheticals, but when you get into the job environment, it's not like that at all. No day on the job is like the classroom. Immediately a lot of what you thought were "rules" don't apply anymore. There isn't a rule book. Everything you sort of planned, and planned on, doesn't work, and the theoretical goes out the window.

In classes you teach students how to use a microscope, or archiving, or gallery management, but then you take that out into the world

and everything is different. Suddenly they have a supervisor. Suddenly they have to be at the job at a certain time every day, ready to go to work prepared and not still half-asleep or in their pajamas, or having pulled several all-nighters preparing for an English exam. They have to function. They might be very intelligent and very motivated, but in the workplace the dynamics and the paces are different.

AS: The scenarios that you talked about with students coming in and having to deal with new rules and standards are so true. Suddenly there are project production schedules, there are professional standards in every field, brand standards, creative standards, laboratory protocols, more things than I could name.

I have supervised five or six interns and have worked with dozens at Eastman House. Naturally, every single one of them has that kind of learning curve, and they are responsible on a professional level. They have to learn to deal not only with the projects' production stages and schedules, but the collegial personalities, and as you said, Michael, the politics. Being inaugurated into the three P's. Really, it is an incredible learning experience—and eye-opening—for them. We've had mostly positive experiences from our end, and a few negative experiences where the students weren't able to fulfill their responsibilities and didn't have either the maturity or the discipline to keep it going.

LV: Michael, remember, that co-op we ran with the Pittsburgh coroner's office?

MP: Oh yes.



Student: Timothy R. Tiebout, RIT, Biomedical Photographic Communications. Host/Client: Research and Development Department Imaging Intern for Canfield Scientific Inc., Research and Development Department, Fairfield, NJ. Assignment: Photograph preserved fetal pig specimens as skin reference to aid early testing of prototype skin imaging systems, July 2011

LV: The coroner would hire our students, but he would handle it a special way. Of course, they all thought they wanted to work in forensics, it has become so popular now.

AS: The fictionalized depictions in the media have made it sexy.

LV: Exactly. It's completely sexy, it's completely trendy, with CSI and NCIS and all of those TV shows. Everybody digs forensics. So he would hire our students and tell them, "You're going to come spend a week with me, and we'll talk after that week." And in that week they would discover whether they could tolerate the reality of the job or not. We actually had it go both ways. He knew that some could handle the intensity of it and some could not.

So for us, what's crucial is applying what you've learned to the work environment. We can't teach the work ethic piece of it in the classroom. We can reinforce it, but that coroner could help them live it with his message: "If after a week you're still with me, you're with me for the summer. And if after the week you've decided this is not where you want to be, that's okay too." That kind of confirmation, one way or another, is the affirmation students need and a core of experiential learning. It's better they find out sooner rather than later.

MP: Totally. That's the educational outcome from a co-op program. There it is in a nutshell. Two things can happen. They can find themselves or they can find out what they don't want to do for the rest of their lives.

AS: Perhaps even more valuable.

MP: This is enormously important. Sometimes realizing what you don't want to do can be an even better outcome. At age eighteen, I was going to be a doctor. That was my thing, and then I learned about photography. It changed my life. Eighteen-year-olds don't know anything. They think they know. But life changes. We get curveballs and fastballs and opportunities to go left or right or straight or up or down, and sometimes those things work out well and sometimes they don't, for all kinds of reasons. If a co-op student comes back and says, "I never want to do that for the rest of my life," to me that's a great outcome.

AS: Given that scenario and a little bit of what you talked about earlier, would you say that sometimes it's better to have students go out and do internships, or at least observation and shadowing experiences, earlier in their academic career to help them determine a sound career path?

MP: Absolutely. I'm all about discovery learning. That approach has been a really powerful tool in my own life, because you know you've got to get out of your comfort zone to change or take on new knowledge. The worst that can happen is nothing, and the best that can happen is something. Just embrace it and run with it.

AS: Obviously co-ops, internships, and these kind of work-study experiences need to be vetted in some way academically and administratively. What other things are necessary to protect the student to make sure that these are the experiences you want them to have? Imagine a small program someplace that hasn't really been active with internships or co-ops—they don't have the kind of history you



Student: Jamie Kraus, RIT, Biomedical Photographic Communications. Host/Client: Photography Intern for Time Out Chicago, Chicago, IL. Assignment: Photograph R&B and soul singer/songwriter Heather Headley performing during a women's health benefit at the Ravenswood Event Center, June 7, 2012

do—and they want to get this started. What would you suggest that they do to build the necessary structure to enrich the students?

LV: Start small and build trust that it is going to happen. In order for opportunities to be useful and to be a positive work environment for the students, that trust has to be built between the university and the sponsors.

MP: Taking on an intern is a huge commitment of time and responsibility. Sometimes the days are not so smooth because the intern is in a bad mood or you're in a bad mood and the whole day goes south. As educators, we inherently understand that. But for the sponsor or employer taking on an intern is like raising a teenager on every level, every minute, while you still have your full-time job to do. They come back from lunch and had a fight with their girlfriend and they bring it into the workplace for the whole day. Or, they wear flip-flops! You told them no flip-flops in the lab. They're going to be working around acids and chemicals and they come in dressed in a totally inappropriate way and wearing flip-flops, and think that's okay!

LV: Preaching to the choir!

AS: Yes, I've lived that only without the acid. Instead it was major donors and trustees ... which is perhaps just as serious for a museum but without the risk of chemical burns.

MP: Then you'll have the other kid that's in a suit and they're there an hour early and waiting at the door. You'll get the whole spectrum, and that's what—for the right employer—makes the experience of bring students into the workplace great fun.

AS: I'll admit to a couple of bad experiences with interns and volunteers early in my career. Of course museums are hotbeds of internship activity. The good will of volunteers is one of the foundations on which museums are built both from an educational perspective, as institutions of learning, but also from the perspective of support for staff. After those early bad experiences I stayed away from taking others on for the better part of a decade. I didn't have the time to manage those experiences anymore. But then I met Lisa and we began to figure out what we could do to make this work, and we established a program that was beneficial for both the student and the museum. Interns are with us long enough, a year, so that it really counts almost as volunteering. Yet we construct the experience as an internship so that the mentoring aspects of the relationship remain at its core.

LV: A big piece of what RIT and Eastman House have created with that program has been possible because of our proximity. Ours is a longer time commitment, which definitely isn't the norm. But because you are here and we are here in Rochester, that allows us to extend the internship relationship.

Location and geography are always major factors that have to be managed and sometimes overcome. RIT more often is sending students all over the world for shorter periods of time—regularly ten weeks. We work on building strong relationships with host organizations, but in the end we send them off and hope for the best. That adds a different level of stress and anxiety and hopefulness for us as administrators and faculty.

AS: How do you build those successful relationships with potential host companies and organizations? How do you advise others to foster those connections?

MP: Well, I think it takes a lot of time. You have to be willing to put the time into it. While it's not gardening, there are many analogies that could be derived there. If you're going to plant a seed, you have to take care of it. In the beginning, Lisa spends hours, months, or years communicating with potential hosts. Faculty and educators need to consider if they want to take on that role. It requires a dedicated effort.

But for educators it is worth the effort. Not only do the students gain valuable experience, but we learn so much when the kids come back: what they did, and what is real experience versus simply theoretical ideas. They bring back and share the latest of what the industry is doing now and what we may not be teaching.

The institute must also protect the students. We have a responsibility to facilitate that they have a positive work and life experience. But there are other aspects to it as well. We have to not only protect the students and their interests, but also the reputation of the university and its programs. The students are ambassadors for the university. A host can't put a kid in the studio and expect him to make coffee all day, every day, and that's all they do. In building a program like this from the ground up you find one place the first year for one student and build from there.

AS: How do you protect students from being nothing but errand runners and coffee delivery people? How do you protect them from the boss from hell?

MP: When you are starting out sometimes you can't avoid these problems until they are in the middle of it.

AS: Basically you have to encourage students to communicate with you.

LV: At RIT the co-op is not credit-bearing, but it is a requirement on a transcript, while an internship is credit-bearing and earns a grade. In either scenario, what we require is that the student do a summary report and the sponsor produce an evaluation of the student as well.

AS: What criteria are most valuable in determining not only the student's success, but also the success of that internship program and the employer's relationship with the school?

LV: The questions on our student's co-op and internship work reports are open-ended so it allows us to gather more information and come to better conclusions. We can use that data to critique what we are doing to prepare the students, and it can also provide useful and sometimes interesting information about the work environments. It helps us determine if those work environments are healthy for our students. Still we don't often find too many surprises. Occasionally you'll read something that you probe into more thoroughly.

Overall, I'm looking for my "teachable moments": things that I'd rather they hear from us now before they leave us and go out into the work world. Because there are things that could catch up with them later. Some of those things can be touchy subjects: everything from punctuality or interpersonal relationships to hygiene and wardrobe. The reports help us address, well, everything.

MP: When you design a course, at the end of the class the student will be able to do certain things. It is a very controlled environment where you are the instructor and you design the learning outcomes. That's easy to choreograph. But when the student goes out into the workplace—whether a part-time job or temporary—it's a *job*. But the majority of co-op sponsors have not taught before, ever. The university can't expect that they will develop learning objectives for the student in the same kind of way. The evaluation tool that the co-op office produces is sort of a work evaluation. It's a standard rubric that measures basics: "What did they do the last ten weeks? Did they ask for a sick day every week?" Looking at things like attendance, interaction with other colleagues in the department, professionalism, knowing how to dress ... What are other things on the form?

LV: Are they technically prepared? Do they take initiative?

MP: And while they're on the job, again it's this thing about trust. I also consider the other side. If someone is going to sponsor a

student, they are invested in that internship in different ways. Most people aren't going to totally exploit that kid: they are looking to mentor on some level. Of course, there are some real screwballs out there, but most people that want to take on a work-study student are going to actively work to make it a good experience for them both. And in the vast majority of cases it turns out just fine. Others are going to be less proactive: "Here's your office, here's your desk, here's the things we need you to do, see you in August." But then the world of work is like that too. Right?

LV: That and everything in between.

AS: No matter how you try to control or regiment it all, it is really as varied as the personalities and the work experiences.

MP: It is.

LV: And the settings that they're in.

MP: It works. Somehow, even though it defies explanation, it does work.

LV: It's the relationships that have been developed. Everything is based on trust. You have to trust that I know what I'm doing, I have to trust that employers are going to take care of our students, we have to trust that our students are going to do their best ... and somehow ...

AS: And the employers have to trust that the quality of the educational program and classes are such that they're going to have a good experience with the student.

LV: Exactly.

MP: I don't award a satisfactory completion of a co-op until I've read the co-op reports. For instance you at Eastman House could say you hated the student and the student could say they loved Eastman House. That would leave me wondering why. How could the feedback be so disparate? Something was not right with this. Then it becomes our responsibility to sort it out.

AS: There are expectations on both sides. I'd assume that employers have unrealistic expectations as often as students. A significant part of this is the need to protect student rights—core rights by law, interns and co-op students have the same employment rights as every

other employed person. But there are also questions about students being exploited as "free labor" that has become a popular topic in the media since the recession.

What do you advise regarding administrators and faculty educating themselves about those rights and educating students to self-advocate?

LV: This is an interesting question. I have been here seventeen years, and prior to this I was doing the same kind of work at another large co-op school for eight years. In the twenty-five-plus years I've been doing this, I have not had a problem with what is being termed "exploitation" in the media recently.

Years ago I had a situation where a company called and made their experience sound like the greatest thing ever. They were looking for a finance student to work with international markets. When I checked the place out it was a check-cashing store with bulletproof glass and such. The rule of thumb was, and is, that you never send your students anywhere you haven't been yourself. You say no, and you walk away from opportunities like that.

These partnerships do run the gamut. Some employers cover their bases by requiring that a student receive academic credit. They are basically saying, "Legally you have to be getting something out of this."

MP: But the students are pretty savvy too, and we work to make them that way. In many co-op situations there are special regulations and protocols that must be followed. In medical environments there are HIPPA regulations. In arts organizations, copyright law. To the extent that it is possible we begin in class one, day one, freshman year to impart that there are professional expectations out there. That knowledge is critical, but also the common sense of the students and sponsors plays a role. If students go out there and they know what they are being asked to do is wrong, they are going to know to talk to Lisa or their professors. Yet, in twenty-seven years, I think I've had one student reach out saying that their internship was totally wrong on every level and asking how they should handle it.

AS: Ultimately the answer to protecting them is empowering the students with the knowledge that you are there, the communication lines are open, and they are not running solo.

MP: Ultimately, yes. There also may be contractual requirements, non-disclosure agreements, and similar things that the students have

to agree to and navigate, and then fulfill. These can cause complications. There can be misunderstandings and confusion that create significant issues: all kinds of potential landmines. But again we're talking about experiential learning. You prepare the students the best you can.

Of course, universities need to cover the students with liability insurance, health insurance, and other things that must be considered. But this is about learning the experiences of the real world through living them. Kids are going to be kids and employers are going to make mistakes. You have to have an open mind. You can't dwell on that part of it. You have to dwell on the positive part of it and the positive impact of the experience for both the kids and the employer.

AS: That level of professionalism—or should I say maturity that allows professionalism—has to be key. Lisa, when you are sending a student out to whatever experience they are going to participate in, how do you prepare them for walking in on the first day? What are you telling them about communication, about professionalism?

LV: I always say I have the greatest sales job. I'm out there selling, basically, our students as interns or co-ops to organizations. My hope is that the potential hosts are going to want to buy into that. Hopefully, I've done enough of the groundwork with an organization to have a solid idea of what they think our students will be doing. We've started with a job description, a position description, and some guidelines there. We need to set parameters: a start date and end date, how many hours a week are expected, is there any sort of compensation, what does that include? It could be hourly, it could be a stipend

MP: It could be lodging!

LV: Yes it could be assistance with housing, or it could be a transportation pass. All of those

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Louise Brunk in *Diary of a Lost Girl* 17026

Student: Jackson James, RIT, Professional Photographic Illustration and Film and Animation. Host/Client: Design Intern, Communications Department, George Eastman House, Rochester, NY. Assignment: Design poster to promote avenues for patrons to connect with the museum's Dryden Theatre schedule, Fall 2011. © George Eastman House



Student: Lindsay Quandt, RIT, Imaging and Photographic Technology. Photograph by Richard Hailstone. Host/Client: Undergraduate Research Assistant for Dr. Grover Schwartzlander, RIT College of Imaging Science. Assignment: Develop ways to chemically induce the formation of silver nanorods along stretched polarizing polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) using transmission electron microscope (TEM) imaging to evaluate results. Pictured: A silver structure formed from silver nitrate and sodium diphenylamin-4-sulfonate in PVA, August 2012

things are options. I try to establish as much of that ahead of time so the students understand the parameters. But the students are active in the process. We don't place a student and then send them off. Some places do placements: "Here Michael, this is your job for the summer," "Here Amy, this is your job for the summer." We don't do that.

Ours is very much an active process where the students decide the things they would like to pursue, and they apply for the position as they would to any job. Through that process they are getting



Student: Ryan Harriman, RIT, Biomedical Photographic Communications. Host/Client: Trainee Clinical Photographer for the Media Resources Centre at The University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff, Wales. Assignment: Photograph antique anesthesia equipment. Pictured: Chloroform anesthesia mask, July 24, 2012

experience in marketing themselves. It typically requires them to produce a cover letter, resume, samples of their work, and then to follow up with the sponsor. Learning the rules of professional follow up is key: what's appropriate, what's borderline harassment? That's all part of the skills we are working on with them from the start. I meet with the BS students in the survey class the first year. Anybody in the BFA programs is in a class with me second year called "Career Seminar" where we work through procedures and talk about building these kinds of professional skills.

What I find is, like in everything, each student is ready at a different time. You just hope that they know where to draw from when they are ready and that they have gotten enough from you about how to network, how to apply, what should you be tweeting and what you shouldn't be tweeting

MP: What's the answering message on your cell phone?

LV: We go through that ALL the time.

AS: That's the reality. I've seen so much of each scenario: students who were ready and those who were not. It runs the gamut, as do their expectations. Are their expectations realistic or not?

Last year I taught two classes to the SPAS Visual Media students. Both classes covered different aspects of job searching, networking, and career preparation—essentially getting students ready to leave the academic setting for the workplace. Some students totally got it, but others had expectations that were very unrealistic, about how to get jobs, what they'd be doing at jobs, etc. When it came to internships, there was the question of paid versus unpaid. The downturn in the economy in late 2008 really has affected this greatly. There are fewer paid internships, and more often companies and not-for-profit organizations are reaching out looking for unpaid workers whom they can mentor.

MP: That does seem to be a trend, or at least, that is what is being reported. But in the BS programs that has not been our experience.

AS: Really?

MP: I don't believe that if you charted it there was really any kind of huge decline.

LV: In the BS programs I would agree with you. That decline didn't happen in health care but it happened in the other side of the house: in the arts. Absolutely. When I look at my BFA kids, there is that decline. For example, some places that were once able to pay are no longer able to pay because how can they justify that when they've had layoffs?

AS: What I was hearing from Visual Media students about opportunities promoted in different online platforms was, "It's unpaid, I'm not interested." I absolutely understand that there are going to be some financial reasons that students may or may not consider unpaid as a possibility. But I would encourage them, if the position was something that was parallel to their career path, to figure out a way to do it! Not only is the experience invaluable, but also they are building experiences and contacts that open doors.

LV: Here's the struggle: I often tell them that if they can, they should commit to taking advantage of those opportunities now while they are in school and find a way to make that work. If not, they'll have to do it, to pay those dues, when they graduate. To graduate with a degree and no practical experience isn't going to

get you very far. There is nothing there that sets you apart from anybody else.

AS: Exactly.

LV: Yet, if an opportunity is unpaid, I push that it be limited to part time. It's very rare that you'll see us push an unpaid full-time experience because it's not realistic. Our kids need to be able to work to make money to support themselves.

MP: You know, it's funny, in my experience a lot of co-ops that have started out unpaid, somehow at the end of the summer manage to secure a stipend. They give the kid a one-time payment.

LV: Yes. I've seen that too.

MP: It has happened more times than not. Plus, Lisa's a great negotiator. She's been able to get hosts to help with housing, or commuter rail passes and parking, or the volunteer lunch program. Or each day, even if it's only twenty-five bucks a day, that makes a difference. You've got to deal with the apartment. But transportation and eating somehow can get funded from some budget by the host. When you're exploring the kinds of opportunities, you can't always think about it as an hourly wage.

AS: Be creative in what you are negotiating for your students.

MP: And you can't assume a student would say that interacting with the people or the venue of the co-op made them all "warm and fuzzy." Yet so many times when it's all over they have great going away lunch parties or have everybody over for dinner and everybody misses each other. Kids are kids and they can change your day, and they're goofy and they come with all kinds of naiveté, but when the summer's over, everybody's benefitted. The organization is better for it and so is the student.

AS: And the network that the students are creating by reaching out in those ways, it's establishing a foundation for the rest of their career.

LV: With the students that I'm seeing now, you're exactly right. The students that are coming in now are talking about what they did the past summer, indicating that they were told to stay in touch, and asking, "How do I do that? What does that mean?" So I walk them through it. For me, there's the payoff.

AS: That's really it. We're talking about not being able to go successfully into the marketplace without having the experience along with the academic credits. But there's also the fact that connections are what get your name passed around, build references, and get feet in doors. A resume only says so much.

MP: They now have references that they didn't have as a student.

LV: They've got folks advocating for them in different ways than a school can advocate for them. You can't place a value on that. You can't pay for it with money. You've got to earn it.

AS: Michael talked briefly about stipends somehow miraculously appearing at the end of an unpaid internship. Let's take that a step further. How often do you see internships then migrating to a job offer?

LV: It happens more often than we think. The other piece of it is the job offer may not be directly with the person you interned with, but someone that you interacted with at that workplace, so it's an off-shoot. It happens pretty often. One of the questions we ask the host on the evaluation is, "If a full-time position were available, would you hire this student?" That's a great gauge for me. That tells me this person's probably on the right path. Sometimes there is an offer but there's a delay. It might not happen when they graduate in May but by the fall they're back in the environment where they were.

MP: Sometimes it's a little more organic than that. A host company is looking at the student not day to day, but asking if they kind of fit into the corporation's culture. How do they interact with people who are PhDs, or who are physicians, or Nobel Prize winners? Are they going to be able to do that? Can they talk? Do they have an air of confidence? Do they have problem-solving skills, and are they resourceful? Are they cut from that cloth? Can they make that work for them? And then, as much as a year or two later, that active conversation begins about full-time employment. It's hard to tell you a percentage, but I would estimate maybe twenty-five to thirty percent get job offers later. Lisa, do you think that's too high?

LV: No, I'd guess that it would be higher if we tracked it.

MP: Okay, so I'm underestimating, but that would be specific to the BS programs. I don't think that would be true in the BFA programs. There's not a job out there that says, "I want to hire a fine art photographer."

That specific employment parallel doesn't exist. There's no monster.com advertisement for "fine art photographers." So they are going to have to go out and invent what they want to do to be in that world. It's all about innovating and creating and networking and showing. That's where internship and co-op experiences are crucial.

AS: And it's the creative aspects of how you apply those experiences that matters, because, as we discussed earlier, each one of them builds on your understanding of what you want to do and what you're willing to do, what you're willing to sacrifice, and what you really want to focus on. Am I willing to put X number of hours in for free, or on the cheap now in order to make it later? Or do I want to skate now and work harder later?

I'm curious, going along these lines, how does the strength of the work experience and the experiential education aspect of co-ops and internships help with admissions? In your experience are students thinking this way coming in? I'm not going to ask for specific numbers, though I'll bet you track them.

LV: I know they do.

AS: So a strong co-op/internship program strengthens your "sell" at admissions.

LV: If you're a parent and you're about to fork over a whole lot of money for an education, ultimately at the end of that line, what do you really want to know? Is my kid going to be employable? Are they going to be able to support themselves and that sort of thing?

MP: And move out of the house!

LV: And move out of the house, hopefully. So, absolutely, I can tell at certain times of the year my phone starts ringing and it's the times when, as a high school senior, you've got to make your commitment to where you'd like to be in the fall. My phone starts ringing and it's parents asking what I can tell them about our program and where our grads go and what they do and that kind of thing. Every year. Good for them. I'd be asking the same questions. I would want to know who recruits from your school. Who is looking at your grads? Who knows the product that you are producing and appreciates that product? This happens all the time, and that's the division I'm in: Enrollment Management and Career Services. But that's where we field a ton of good questions. The students have questions and the parents have questions.



Student: Sara Kelly, RIT, Photojournalism. Host/Client: Event Photography Intern, Communications Department, George Eastman House, Rochester, NY. Assignment: Photograph darkroom practice during an alternative process workshop on making cyanotypes, chromatypes, and photogenic drawings held in June 2012.

AS: So, really, in all aspects of this, for students, parents, educators, and hosts, and from the very beginning, it has to be about expectations, experience, and balance.

LV: It is ALL about experience and balance and then, at some point, the "AHA!" light goes on and it all clicks.

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