Each of us have been blessed with a variety of unique gifts, skills, and talents which we can utilize to improve others’ lives, to better society as a whole, and to shape — and change — the world for future generations.

But, how can we fully apply such talents on a daily basis, both within and outside of the greater workforce? How can we be assured that the world’s current and future leaders are prepared for long-term, successful careers that will positively impact their respective fields, industries, and communities for years to come?

To educate students for longstanding, active lives of leadership and service, all of Hope’s academic departments offer internships—each tailored to the respective program—that enable students to apply the knowledge, life lessons, and expertise they have acquired in the classroom, while also obtaining valuable work experience in the fields they are most passionate about. The experience is especially beneficial for those seeking full-time positions in a competitive job market, but is equally important in a broader sense, helping students determine the paths they’ll follow after graduation.

“In this fluctuating economy, internships are almost a necessity,” said Sara DeVries, associate director of career services. “Many employers now view their internship programs as primary recruiting tools for entry-level talent while offering full-time, permanent positions to current and former interns before seeking additional candidates.

“Internships provide students with opportunities to observe professionals at work, to ask questions about their fields through informational interviews, and to receive professional networking contacts,” DeVries said. “Students are able to acquire hands-on, professional level work experience which will help them ‘stand out’ as they apply for jobs or graduate schools. Through internships, students can clarify their callings and affirm their directions for the future.”

Internships are typically semester- or summer-long, supervised work experiences in professional environments that are highly related to students’ majors or career interest areas. Students receive academic credit upon the successful completion of the internship experience, and they may also be paid during it. Hope currently offers domestic or international semester-long internship programs in locales ranging from as nearby as Hope’s Holland hometown, to Philadelphia, Chicago, Tokyo and Melbourne.

While obtaining real-world experience, students also enroll in courses that complement their temporary positions. The structure varies, from weekly seminars to independent studies, but the emphasis is on providing the opportunity to discuss their internship experiences, understand the ways in which their coursework applies to the tasks and demands of their internships, and implement plans for their future career endeavors.

Emily Van Wieren ’12 was among the numerous sophomore-, junior- and senior-level students who participated in internships this summer. A chemistry and biology major from Grand Ledge, Mich., she conducted biological research with the Van Andel Institute (VAI), a leading research organization that focuses on the treatment of various diseases, including cancer, osteoporosis, and diabetes.

Van Wieren’s internship developed in a rather unique manner. Last October, the college’s men’s soccer team hosted a Community for a Cure Purple Game to support VAI’s cancer research. Some of the proceeds supported the highly competitive, 10-week internship at VAI’s headquarters.

Throughout the summer, she met several experts within the science industry, while also discovering which types of careers may best
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– Sara DeVries, Associate Director of Career Services