“How I Spent My Summer Vacation”

By Greg Olgers ’87

The summer provides a break from the intensity of the school year, but that doesn’t mean that learning ends. Instead, for many students the season provides a chance to live those classroom lessons through internships and similar placements that anticipate the careers for which they are preparing. This summer it’s a typically varied mix, with Hope students’ roles ranging from teaching children through campus programs, to crewing a television show, to working in athletic training with the NFL, to conducting collaborative faculty-student research.

The benefits of such experiences are so clear that Dr. Deborah Weiss ’75 Sturtevant of the social work faculty has even made involving students in experiential learning a central focus of her teaching and research. She has helped connect students with local service organizations and has taken students abroad as she has conducted research in Europe, Latin America and Asia. She has been working this summer, for example, with junior Katherine Kelly of Midland, Mich., conducting research on campus as well as in China, where they also participated in a professional conference together.

“For me it’s about connecting the academic goals to experience—it’s very much integrated,” she said. “The level of satisfaction for courses is significantly higher for students that can connect experience to courses and have a service component. They have more confidence in their classes.”

The Office of Career Services has found that some 92 percent of graduating Hope seniors report having had some sort of experiential-learning opportunity while at the college, if not in the summer then during the school year. As for the rest, the office is continually reaching out and hopes that they will stop by to talk about their interests, because the opportunities are out there, and the benefits too good to miss.

“The liberal arts education, combined with relevant, valuable, experiential learning—whether it’s an internship or whether it’s research—provides the best preparation in a challenging market,” said Dale Austin, director of career services. “In a sense it’s liberal arts-plus. It’s the liberal arts plus these experiences that are so helpful in a volatile market.”

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The pay-off can be quite direct. Sara DeVries, associate director of career services, noted that the most recent annual survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that more than two thirds of interns nationally receive a full-time offer to work after graduation in the organization for which they interned. Also according to the survey, students who have held internships earn on average 13 percent more when they launch their first job than those who haven’t. Career Services assists with other, and some are lined up by entering students on their own. Here are the stories of an even dozen:

* Athlete training major and seniors Troy Blaas of Gaylord, Mich., and Tyler Courtright of Jenison, Mich., have both been holding highly competitive internships with National Football League teams. Blaas has been working with the Detroit Lions, and Cortright is in his second year with the Green Bay Packers. They earned their placements because of preparation that included not only solid academics but a variety of applied experiences including working with Hope athletes through the college’s athletic training program.

Each sees clear benefits as they look toward the future:

“I am quickly learning that my profession is multi-faceted and some of the certified athletic trainers have their own niches that are much different from others,” Haas said. “It is amazing how much I learn from just assisting these professionals with their daily duties while serving the athletes.”

“The difference in the pros is that it all moves faster than at any other level, so I have learned to be prepared for anything and everything,” Cortright said. “An opportunity like this is hard to come by, and the type of training will most definitely give me the edge I am ready to stand up my career.”

Senior chemistry major Kristin Dittenhafer is among the 138 students conducting collaborative research with national magazines located in many ways.  The academic departments or  as he says, “the stories of an even dozen:”

* Senior Ashley DeVrech of Byron Center, Mich., won a prestigious editorial internship with Guideposts magazine in New York through a program of the American Society of Magazine Editors. The program chose only 37 students for placements with national magazines located in many ways.  The academic departments or  as he says, “the opportunities to not only hone his skills but  the paths to their career.”

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“Beyond the skills and training that they can gain, interns, VanderZwart notes, also have the opportunity to demonstrate how much they can offer to employers. “You can show off your potential as much as you put into it, and I've seen that time and time again with the Hope students,” he said. “They really know that they're getting—pick right up on the work because of the quality of their education.”