

# • From Student • to Intern • to Photographer

How and why to land a fabulous internship next year.

by TALIA ARGONDEZZI

**MOST OF US WOULDN'T DREAM OF** getting married without first dating and getting to know our potential life partner. In fact, many people won't even buy a pair of jeans without trying them on beforehand. Yet many students choose a career—the work that consumes the majority of an ordinary day—without ever experiencing it firsthand.

Internships offer photography students a way to try on a career or two before making a commitment. They also provide students an opportunity to decide whether their skills will be best used in a gallery, a magazine, a photography studio, or elsewhere.

Furthermore, internships give students the kind of hands-on training that cannot be duplicated in the classroom. As Lindsay MacDonald, a Baltimore-based editorial, portrait and wedding photographer and a recent graduate of the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), puts it, "Internships are a great way to get real work experience to put on your résumé, and they also provide a broad network of contacts in the photography world. Now that I'm freelanc-

ing full-time, I always return to the commercial studios where I interned to ask advice about contracts, pricing, dealing with clients—everything!"

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## Locating the Right Internship

On a blustery January afternoon in 2007, photography student (and past *PDNedu* Storytellers contributor) Rafael Soldi trudged through New York City's Chelsea neighborhood with a gallery map clenched in his fist. "I visited every show and gallery I was even remotely interested in," says Soldi, who received his BFA from MICA in 2009 and now has a paid position at a Manhattan photography gallery. "If I liked the gallery I just went up to the desk, told them I was interested in an internship and asked whom I should address my cover letter to." Meanwhile, in Baltimore, MacDonald was looking for internships closer to home, at the local newspapers and magazines with which she was most familiar. And at the University of Arizona's Eller College of Management in Tucson, marketing major and pho-

tographer Bobbiee Hartman spent about 12 months scouring the Internet for internship opportunities in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Boulder, Colorado.

Despite the drastic differences among these approaches to internship research, the three student photographers shared one crucial element: perseverance. Soldi completed his investigative gallery tour during a single trip to New York, but it was his extensive follow-up that ultimately won him a dream internship at ClampArt Gallery. As he explains, "I went home and wrote cover letter after cover letter after cover letter. I went to the career services office at my school many, many times. I sent out 15 applications, heard back from five galleries, got four interviews and was offered two or three positions." And while MacDonald ended up interning at a magazine she knew and loved, *Urbanite*, the application process was arduous: "The hardest

## BRIDGE TO A FUTURE CAREER:

Internship aficionado Rafael Soldi photographed a friend dressed to impress and on the run in Central Park after a job interview.

part was getting people to respond," she explains. "Photographers and editors are busy, and lots of students want internships with them. I sent out 50 or 60 e-mails and cover letters and constantly followed up on them. You have to be very persistent."

Hartman, who ended up dividing her summer between two internships, one at *Shape* magazine and the other with PDN, agrees: "The single piece of advice I would give to someone looking for an internship? Even if people don't get back to you, keep contacting them. Try different people in the company. Call and ask who's the best person to contact. Don't give up on a place easily."

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### Testing the Waters

As they persist, though, students in search of internships should also relax: The purpose of interning is not to land your ideal lifelong career but simply to discover what you like and what you're good at. Courtney A. Resnick, career counselor and internship coordinator at MICA's Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Career Development, repeatedly assures students, "There is no wrong internship. Students put pressure on themselves to find the 'perfect' internship, but that doesn't exist. Plus, it's just as valuable, if not more, to learn what you don't want to do as it is to learn what you do want to do."

For example, trying a wide variety of internships allowed MacDonald to narrow down her career choices as she advanced through college. She explains, "My first internship was at a commercial studio, and it made me realize that I didn't want to do that. I realized I wanted to do more magazine and wedding work, and my future internships helped me make the contacts I needed to succeed as a freelancer in those areas. Getting a variety of internships is very important in identifying which specialty you want to pursue."

Hartman's internships helped her define her career aspirations as well. "When I graduate, I would really love to work as an art buyer for a small, successful ad agency. I didn't know anything about art buying before I did my internships."

To decide which kind of internship to try, Resnick advises, "Ask other students what their internship experiences were like, and ask your professors for advice. Ask people who work in the field you're considering. 'What's a typical day like

for you?' The details of these real-world, everyday experiences will give you a good idea whether it's something you'd like to try."

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### Practical Considerations

Many colleges require their photography students to do an internship or two, as MICA does, and these schools often have helpful career development or internship offices whose staff can guide students through the process. The career development office sometimes has a database or an information binder that lists local or even national companies interested in interns. Whether or not the office specializes in internships, career development staff, as well as faculty members, can be excellent resources to help students with résumés, cover letters and portfolios.

However, most colleges also limit the number of credits a student can earn through internships. This credit limit can pose a problem for students who want to try a second or third internship, since most employers require student interns to earn college credit in lieu of pay. Hartman explains, "When I was looking for magazine internships in New York, I had already received some college credit from previous internships, so I made sure I saved some credits to use in the future."

Students who cannot receive internship credit from their institutions could risk losing out on internships because of institutional or corporate technicalities. In short, it's important for students to pay attention to both school and company internship policies and to be proactive in troubleshooting potential solutions when issues arise. One possible workaround, which was a solution for several of PDN's summer interns whose schools did not offer internship credits, was to seek help from a faculty member and set up a credited independent study project in tandem with the internship.

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### Maximizing the Impact

Soldi, Hartman and MacDonald all believe their internships were successful because they stayed focused and took the work very seriously. In fact, all three chose to intern during the summer so that they could give their full attention to the jobs without having to balance the demands of their coursework.

"I was extremely busy the entire time

I was interning," says Hartman. "Doing two internships at once was fun because I met a lot of different people and picked up a wide array of skills. Plus, staying so busy, I was never homesick."

MacDonald explains, "I loved being in the classroom, but it was really important for me to get out of that bubble and to see how professionals were actually using the skills I was learning. Plus, now that I've graduated, many clients find me through recommendations and word-of-mouth, and I freelance for *Urbanite*. So those internship contacts have lasted in a really concrete way."

Soldi adds that during his gallery internship, "the more I showed that I really wanted to be there, the more work and responsibility they gave me. Now I'm in charge of the interns at my job, so I can see even more clearly how it works. I offer the interns exactly as much as they give me."

So how can photography students make the most of their time as interns? As Soldi points out, "If students show me that they really want to learn, I make their internship experiences amazing." ■

## 24/7 INTERNSHIP SEARCH

IN ADDITION TO DOING RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL'S CAREER DEVELOPMENT OFFICE, CHECK THESE WEB RESOURCES, WHICH REGULARLY POST INTERNSHIP CONNECTIONS.

- ▶ [www.ed2010.com](http://www.ed2010.com) | Ed2010 is run by young magazine editors and aspiring journalists. The site includes advice columns, industry blogs and job listings.
- ▶ [new.youintern.com](http://new.youintern.com) | YouIntern connects potential interns with intern-seeking employers. The site lists both employer-submitted internships and student-submitted internship reviews, so students can read the testimonies of past interns before deciding which opportunities to pursue.
- ▶ [www.indeed.com](http://www.indeed.com) | Indeed, a major employment search engine that aggregates postings from thousands of company career sites and job boards, also offers many internship listings among their daily updates.
- ▶ [www.mediabistro.com](http://www.mediabistro.com) | Mediabistro, whose goal is to change the way workers in creative industries communicate with one another, features a searchable job board, which includes internship postings, as well as career-building courses and gigs for freelancers.
- ▶ [www.summerinternships.com](http://www.summerinternships.com) | A fee-based internship program, University of Dreams Inc. offers international placements, education and work experience without the headache of trying to coordinate such an adventure on your own. Tuition varies by program and is described on each program's Web site.