

PERSPECTIVE

Needed: Intern Slots for Environmental Technicians

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During the presentation on technicians at the December 1999 NAEP board meeting, the question of training was broached. While universities are engaged in training environmental professionals, there are a large number of junior and community colleges, as well as private companies, engaged in offering Associates degrees (or the equivalent) to future environmental technicians. The students being trained as environmental technicians are the subject of this article.

An Associates degree generally requires 64 credit hours of class time, including lab and fieldwork. Many programs cover the basics of environmental practices, as well as how to monitor water and air, the "whys" and "wherefores," and equipment upkeep. Students in these programs, ranging in age from 18 to 40+ years, are being trained for

the technical work they will be doing once hired. This appears to be much more efficient for potential employers than hiring and then training technicians from scratch.

There are more than 100 community colleges located throughout the US that offer training for environmental technicians. Many of these schools work with local companies who bring the students aboard as interns for a specific time period, which is mutually determined by the school and the company (depending on class schedules and other constraints).

One school official bemoaned the fact that our industry was not offering a sufficient number of intern slots for students in these programs. This is in spite of the fact that internships have almost invariably worked out well for the trainee—who often is later employed permanently by the training company—and for the firm itself, which obtains a trained technician at an agreeable price.

Depending on the agreement, internship wages can range from \$0 to somewhere near minimum wage. So there is no misunderstanding, offering an internship is not

offering a permanent job. It is merely a training period so that interns can see how their training applies to the real world.

Many companies who have sponsored internships feel that it is a win-win situation, since the company receives:

- a low-cost, trained intern, and
- a potential employee who has been tested before hiring.

Thus it would behoove NAEP members, as professionals, to support internship programs, assisting in every way possible. Professionals in the position to do so are encouraged to contact local colleges and training facilities and make arrangements to open an intern slot, or to speak to the management of their firm and ask them to make the necessary arrangements.

This is one way to "give back"—it is important to everyone concerned (e.g., your company and your future technician). So, let us offer assistance.

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