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Elite Internship Opens Many Doors for EIU Senior Gabe Grant

Jan-30-2006

Students who pursue higher education sometimes find themselves faced with so many career opportunities that making a choice can be difficult.

That, of course, is a good problem to have.

Just ask Gabe Grant, a Mattoon native who is in his final semester as an undergraduate industrial technology major studying digital printing and Web technology at Eastern Illinois University.

Last summer, Grant earned a coveted internship at the Wisconsin company Quad Graphics, the third-largest commercial printer in the United States and the largest privately owned printer in North America.

Now, he must decide what he wants to do after graduation in May: go on to graduate school, return to the site of last summer's internship for more specialized on-the-job training, or look for other employment options.

He owes much of that flexibility to the Quad Graphics internship, and he knows he never could have gotten there without his background at EIU.

"For Gabe to be chosen for the internship is astronomical," said Phil Age, lead professor in EIU's digital printing imaging and Web technology program. "He had to compete nationally. It put our program on the map."

Landing the internship wasn't easy. Grant went through an intense interview process before being one of 10 students in the nation chosen to participate in the 12-week printing management internship.

"I was very ecstatic when I found out I was selected," said Grant, the son of Joe and Donna Grant of Mattoon.

The paid internship came with "pretty excellent perks," including living rent-free in nice apartments near the plant, Grant said.

Grant served as an intern in several departments in four different plants, including a facility that is one of the largest in this hemisphere.

His supervisors told him, "You're here to work, but your No. 1 goal is to ask as much as you can and learn as much as you can."

He got in on the action by helping to troubleshoot problems and suggesting ways to fix printing presses.

"You learned how to think a lot, but you had to be a quick thinker, also, just like you have to do in a real-world situation," Grant said. "They really wanted to let you learn and let you understand."

The entire internship was an excellent learning opportunity, he said.

"I gained real-world working experience from an industry leader in a fast-paced environment," he said. "I'm sure it's going to give me a competitive advantage and set me apart from anyone else that's applying for a job."

Grant, who serves as vice president of the EIU chapter of the Technical Association of the Graphic Arts, made additional professional industry contacts in December at a national graphic-imaging conference in Phoenix, where he talked to representatives of corporations, buyers and manufacturing companies.

"What impressed me about Gabe is he did very well as an ambassador, not only for the program, but for the university," Age said. "As a result of Gabe's internship, the Quad Graphics corporate recruiter visited EIU to recruit students for internships and careers in print management. In addition, she visited with marketing students."

Grant said his career options are vast because of the broad range of knowledge he's gotten from the EIU School of Technology. That exposure has helped him to narrow down his career interests, and he hopes to eventually become a production manager or perhaps own a small business.

But the question for him at the moment is whether to continue his education or apply for acceptance into Quad Graphics' two-year corporate trainee program for management-bound employees.



EIU senior Gabe Grant works in the EIU School of Technology's digital printing lab.

Since starting in 1971, Quad Graphics has grown to a \$2 billion company. “So that tells me that they have their head on straight, and that’s the kind of organization I want to work for,” Grant said.

Then again, he knows that furthering his education could bring even more opportunities his way. Fortunately, either choice he makes will be most likely be a winner.

“He’s not going to have any problem finding a job,” Age said. “He’s management-bound.”