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Internships – learn how one firm does it well!

Want to start an internship program or take your existing program to the next level? Then you'll want to take a look at Kroenke Sports Enterprises to see how you can make your program better. The Denver Nuggets, the Colorado Avalanche, Colorado Mammoth (lacrosse), the Colorado Rapids (soccer) and Altitude Sports (TV network) all are part of Kroenke, a privately held firm which knows how to run an internship program right. Of the 30-40 interns hired each semester, 10 were hired from DU last year because they tend to be highly organized, driven students who are very serious about their education. Kroenke has nearly 500 employees and almost all departments participate. While it takes time and effort to run a good internship program, if you do it right the return on your investment will be high.

Started informally in the 1990s, the program was further developed in 2001 when a DU student was hired as an intern to research how to turn it into the very organized, company-wide program it is today. She surveyed numerous large sports organizations and incorporated the best aspects of their programs. A former intern, Mike Skarzynski, now HR Manager, was hired full-time to take over the program. "The key to our success is making the relationship mutually beneficial for students and the company," said Mike. "Sure, the program is a great recruiting tool, enabling the company to test drive possible future talent with little risk. But it is also a great way for the company to give back to the community by making certain the students get as much, or more, out of their time here." For instance, Kroenke has intern lunches one or two times each semester where senior executives speak about how they got where they are today. Kroenke also offers several fun perks to Interns, one of which is several tickets to games, which keeps students inspired.

To ensure that the interns get maximum value from the experience, departments are limited to one or two interns at a time, and supervisors are coached on how to be effective managers of interns. This gives less experienced supervisors a chance to manage people for the first time. To ensure the quality of the program remains high, the HR office confidentially surveys interns each semester, which can be a learning tool for everyone involved.

During the interview process, it is made clear to interns that not all of them will be hired permanently after their internships. At the very minimum, students are expected to gain confidence and learn from being part of the successful operations of a real business since *studying* is one thing but *doing* is another.

Since few students will have prior experience directly related to their internship duties, Mike stressed the importance of a positive attitude and an eagerness to embrace all aspects of work, including the less glamorous tasks. He also looks for:

- Leadership
- The initiative to take on new things
- A desire to make the dept. and the firm better
- Strong written and verbal communication skills

A former intern from Regis University, Tasha Garza, now the HR assistant, said the internship at Kroenke gave her exposure to the actual faces that make the sports team run and a head start to her career. She said that prior to being an intern, "I already was a fan of the teams but as an intern I became a fan of the company." The relationships she developed as an intern helped her become an even better employee. Kroenke is a very fun environment where it is evident that people really want to be there. She added, "People work hard because they feel a part of something."

If you would like to learn more about the Kroenke internship program, Mike encourages you to contact him at MSkarzynski@dsgpark.com or 303.727.3532

To list your internship with DU, go to the Employer page of the Career Center website (<http://www.du.edu/studentlife/career/employers/employers.html>)