

## Virtual Working Group: College Recruiting - Summer Internship Learnings and Fall Campus Plans

September 2020

### Key Takeaways

1. Translating company culture and interactive engagement to a virtual environment were top concerns for companies. In many ways, the virtual format turned out to be a benefit, as senior leaders were more accessible to interns than in an in-person environment.
2. As most internships went virtual and were shortened in duration, the approach to measuring interns' performances also changed. The keys to success here were re-scoping deliverables and expectations and providing interns with a consistent internship structure.
3. For most companies, acceptance of extended full-time offers this year is higher than average. This may impact fall recruitment plans, especially for full-time positions.
4. As fall recruitment season goes virtual, companies are looking to explore the various online tools and platforms to broaden their exposure to diverse talent, and to communicate a clear company brand.

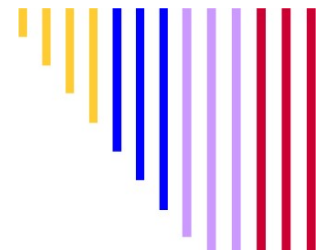
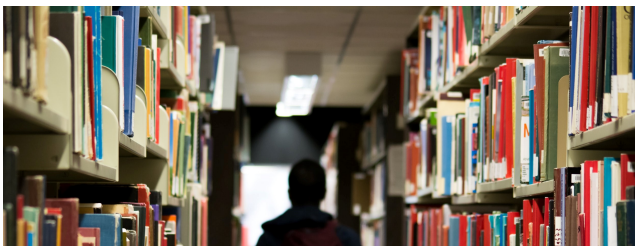
#### Participating Companies

Cigna  
Daiichi Sankyo  
E&J Gallo Winery  
Ecolab  
General Electric  
General Mills  
Hormel  
Medtronic  
Polaris  
SC Johnson

The pandemic impelled companies to quickly transform their summer internships' structure and approach for an all-virtual environment. This created a cadre of challenges and unexpected situations companies have navigated and learned from. As Covid-19 continues, it's not just summer internships that have gone virtual, but fall recruitment season as well. To help partner companies debrief their learnings from the summer, and discuss their approach to fall recruitment season, Beth Flynn-Ferry, Executive Director of CAHRS, hosted a virtual working group with 12 participants from 10 different CAHRS companies. Below is a summary of the key themes and best practices from the working group.

### Translating Company Culture and Creating Engaging Experiences Virtually

Showcasing company culture and creating enriching experiences for interns to interact were top concerns for companies as internships went virtual. For many companies, the virtual environment turned out to be a huge, unexpected benefit. Top leaders, who are able to provide insights into the business strategy and showcase company culture, were much more



accessible online than they would have been in-person. Overall, opportunities for interns to meet and engage with these top leaders increased in this virtual setting.

Companies also noted that interns seemed very enthusiastic and motivated to engage and interact with their cohort and company employees. Companies explored many different formats and events to engage interns. These events ranged from virtual painting events and happy hours, to panel discussions, small working groups and cross-functional projects. Reviews of the more “recreational” events like virtual painting events, cultural events, and happy hours were mixed. While some companies noted that interns were enthusiastic about participating in these, others noted that these events did not really allow for an organic translation of company culture.

Examples of successful experiences in the virtual environment included:

- Providing opportunities for interns to bond organically over shared hobbies and interests or collaborate in smaller groups.
- Leadership panels or lunch and learns that allowed interns to engage with company leaders and experts.
- Case projects that allowed interns from different functions and departments to collaborate with one another and present to senior leadership. This not only helped interns engage and interact, but also enabled them to learn more about the company business.
- Surveying and gathering feedback from the interns themselves on what worked and what could be improved.

Some key takeaways for companies are:

- Continue to engage top leaders virtually, even when employees return to working more centrally, as leaders have more availability this way (no travel, shorter duration) and can be leveraged across many different business functions and locations.
- Build more opportunities for interns in different functions to interact and learn from one another with events such as mini case projects.

## Measuring Interns' Performance in an All-Virtual Environment

All ten CAHRS companies in this working group moved their internships virtually with no in-person elements. Most companies also shortened their internships. With these changes, the question of how to measure interns' performances accurately and fairly arose as a major area of concern. Many companies noted that the remote nature of internships made it easier in some ways to measure interns' performance. Companies felt it was easier to calibrate across interns as they had similar experiences and exposure. A couple of key quotes here were: “We may not have had all the information, but we had the right information” and “the extra ‘noise’ that comes from daily in-person interactions wasn't there. We made sure that we weren't overcomplicating things.”

Especially with shortened internships, companies made very intentional efforts to re-scope projects, deliverables, and expectations to consider what interns would realistically be able to deliver in such a short period of time while working remotely. Compared to previous years, companies based their assessment of performance more on the interns' developmental potential and skillsets, rather than on the quantifiable outcomes of their projects. Communicating these expectations to the intern managers was also noted as a key factor of success. In some companies, the internship was positioned as more of a “final interview,” given all the information gathered during the selection process.



Overall, the two overarching themes here seemed to be consistency and intentionality. Companies worked to provide interns with a much more consistent internship structure (compared to previous years, where interns' experiences may have varied vastly depending on manager and project), and were very intentional about adapting projects and expected deliverables to fit feasible parameters.

## Impact on Full-Time Offers

Almost all companies noted that compared to previous years, the rate of interns who accepted full-time offers was higher than ever before. For companies that also recruit for full-time positions in the fall, these high conversion rates have a definite impact on their fall recruitment plans, with some shifting away from full-time to pursue next year's interns.

The number or percentage of full-time offers that were extended varied greatly across the 10 companies. A couple of companies extended more full-time offers than in previous years, either due to increased business needs or the ability to capitalize on attracting talent that they may not have been able to in prior years due to location.

The pandemic, overall, had a definite effect on companies' consideration of full-time offers. A few of these factors included:

- Covid-19's impact on company's business and finances: While certain sectors have seen an increase in business, in other sectors, certain functions like manufacturing and field sales have been heavily impacted by the pandemic, leading to a lower number of full-time offers
- A talent pipeline and headcount considerations: A couple of companies noted that voluntary turnover has also decreased in these "pandemic times," which impacts the availability of full-time positions to offer returning interns. However, most companies emphasized that top talent should be retained and developed, especially considering long-term talent pipeline development.
- One way to balance cautious consideration of business needs and retaining top talent was to take a tiered approach to offers. Interns with top performances and potential were extended offers first. Offers to other full-time candidates will be made based on the conversion rates of these initial high-potential candidates.
- Relationships with schools: Maintaining and nurturing the close relationships with target schools was another factor that incentivized companies to extend full-time offers to high potential interns.

## Fall Recruitment Plans

Covid-19 has transformed the landscape of fall recruitment completely as well. The big change, of course, is that recruitment has gone all-virtual. However, the other change worthy of note is that recruitment events this year are heavily front-loaded in September. This has created concerns regarding workload and finding the most effective and efficient way to reach talent.

The virtual nature of fall recruitment has introduced all sorts of career fair/recruiting platforms (e.g., Handshake) and technologies. Many companies were concerned about the learning curve for these different platforms and tools, especially for companies with small on-campus recruitment teams that rely on business leaders and partners to participate in recruitment events. To facilitate this "upskilling process," the suggestion of providing business partners with a toolkit of different virtual platforms and recruitment



event talking points was made. Several companies also shared that the fall recruitment cycle would allow them to learn, explore, and test the different tools and technologies, so that they would become experts in the spring.

As companies are no longer beholden to the conventional recruitment structure of physically visiting their core schools and conferences, there is also additional space for creativity and exploration. The top strategic question for this unprecedented fall seems to be how to broaden and expand their exposure to top diverse talent. Many companies are adding additional schools to their list of core schools, as they can now partner with the schools and students virtually without the added logistics, time, and expense of physical travel.

Several companies also shared that, rather than offering events and information sessions for each school, they would be taking a “blended approach” by leading small-group information sessions, leadership panels, or coffee chats, and inviting top candidates from all schools to these. This approach not only allows companies to create more efficient and intimate environments for candidates to learn more about the internship/full-time opportunities, but also allows companies to take control in communicating their company value proposition. This ability to convey the company brand and narrative was noted by several companies as a top priority for this fall recruitment cycle.

One final change to the fall recruiting process mentioned by several companies was moving away from the “Super Friday” approach to final interviews that generally included a number of interviews as well as activities showcasing the culture and leadership of the company to separating the interviews and using the other pieces for conversion later. Another approach was to create more personalized and high touch moments for those receiving offers.

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**This Summary Report was prepared by Beth Flynn-Ferry and Hae-Sung Jung for participants of the College Recruiting - Summer Internship Learnings and Fall Campus Plans Virtual Working Group.**

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