



Anna Lloyd and Rosie O'Beirne



Experience Pays

An on-campus program grants UAB students opportunities that go beyond interning.

INTERNSHIPS HAVE BECOME ESSENTIAL for college students building their portfolios and resumes. However, many are unpaid. This was the reality for Karla Khodanian when she was studying public relations at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. During her final year, she wanted an internship, but she also needed to pay for books, housing and tuition while juggling a busy class schedule.

UAB's Digital Media Fellows Program hopes to help students gain experience in the field and receive a much-needed paycheck at the same time.

Rosie O'Beirne, who has taught media and technology classes at UAB for more than a decade, and Anna Lloyd, a 2011 graduate in media and public policy, collaborated to create the media fellows program in response to two appeals: the demand for high-quality digital storytelling on campus and in the surrounding community, and to supply talented students with the means to build both a relevant portfolio and a salary.

"Our students produced great work, but so often I was asked if I could produce videos for free. If students have the talent, they should be paid for it," O'Beirne says.

The media fellows program rewards students with \$12 an hour for 20 hours of work per week, and a \$1,000 technology stipend to purchase equipment that will enhance their skills and careers. A 12-hour per week internship program, for which students receive class credit, serves as a feeder program for the media fellows.

Students produce digital media content for clients, who are typically UAB affiliates or nonprofit organizations. The fellows program is funded jointly by the revenue from clients and the College of Arts and Sciences, in which it is housed.

The program allows students from all majors to produce digital media content for clients. In its first year, it has produced videos and web content for UAB Admissions and the College of Arts and Sciences, as well as working for non-UAB clients such as Bama Covered, TEDxBirmingham and Col-lat Jewish Family Services.

It's a win-win situation. Students build a digital portfolio with client work, giving them an edge in the job market upon graduation. And hiring skilled students for production offers a cost-effective media team to on-campus entities and area nonprofits.

Khodanian, a communication studies major and graduate of the first class of media fellows, expected social networking and marketing responsibilities, but the program surprised her by taking her out of her comfort zone, she says.

"I got to work with and experience things I never would have been able to do without the media fellows program, and I felt a responsibility to do my best since someone trusted me enough to pay me for it," she says.

Although she had never produced a film before, Khodanian was made producer of the program's film "TEDxBirmingham: Rediscover the

Magic," which won a national silver ADDY award from the American Advertising Federation.

"I'm a huge Birmingham advocate. We (the fellows) love living in the city, and we wanted to convey that," says Khodanian, who is now a digital media specialist at Dogtrot Studio, a creative agency that specializes in brand identity, strategy and communication.

Brent Caswell, who graduated from UAB with a bachelor's in political science, walked into a full-time job as a user-experience designer for New York-company Architizer after interning with the program. "The head of the company was impressed with the work Brent had completed as a media fellow. The combination of his degree and digital skills made him an ideal candidate," O'Beirne says.

Caswell and Khodanian aren't alone; half of the team that graduated UAB this spring is already employed full time, Lloyd says.

In the long run, it can pay to intern, and this internship really pays. ■

Details

Learn more about how students can apply for the 2015-2016 fellowship or how to hire the team at uab.edu/cas/digitalmedia.

BY MORGAN TAYLOR
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