

Growth of the Alliance for Industrial Internships

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Abstract - The Alliance is a network of coordinators and faculty from Biomedical Engineering units that place undergraduate and graduate students in industrial internship experiences. This network provides tools that aid in placing students in opportunities nearer home, in industries specializing in work that matches particular interests, in positions that were obtained through the national effort, and in local positions that would go unused. The Alliance web and phone-based support system enhances each unit's individual efforts by offering additional opportunities and resources. The Alliance has evolved from a small group of 16 initial trial participants, to the current state of over 30 active participants. Evolution of the software and web sites that support the Alliance has occurred through feedback from coordinators, students and companies. A formal survey of our constituents allows for continued improvement of the system and development of a true value-added Alliance. Such feedback is being used to simplify the methods for collecting and distributing student applications. We will explore examples, statistics, and initial results of the first of the full year of the Alliance and address its future direction and growth.

Keywords - Internships, Industry

Introduction

The Alliance is composed of a national coordinator with Alliance-wide responsibilities, affiliated member Universities, which are delivering BME internship opportunities to their students, and industrial participants who provide these opportunities. Individuals in these groups work together using modern personal communication methods and web-based resources developed by the Alliance. Members invest their time learning to navigate the Alliance's technology. In return they have additional opportunities for their students, and access to other Alliance resources.

The Alliance functions as a group of programs working together to collaboratively craft improved methods to place students and promote internship experiences. While this network involves technology, it relies heavily on the interpersonal interactions of the individual program coordinators, the national coordinator, and industrial participants. We have learned that the

coordinator network is the backbone of the Alliance. Each local coordinator works with their students and industrial contacts to place interns, but through the Alliance, they communicate to help place students in non-local opportunities or to share knowledge and experience.

Alliance Growth and Development of Resources

Currently, the Alliance consists of 34 members with planned expansion to include all programs interested in placing BME students into strong, educational experiences in industry. As we grow and adapt to serve our constituents, we have made efforts to expand our presence nation wide. During the past year, the Alliance has worked to develop a professional image by creating a logo, developing a public webpage and a brochure. These items can be viewed at <https://www.orau.com/bme>. The effort has allowed us to reach a broader audience and to focus on recruiting more members and industrial partners.

For the past two years, Alliance members have worked together at the Fall meeting of Biomedical Engineering Society (BMES). The most recent collaboration was a well-received Career Workshop at the annual Fall meeting in Houston. Speakers will be following up by summarizing their talks in articles for the BMES bulletin. This is one of the ways the Alliance is working to create resources for students and programs. The Alliance also had a presence at the 2003 spring regional Biomedical Engineering meeting in Chicago (CUBIC).

We have collaborated with BMES to create a company contact database. This resource is available to all Alliance members and is a valuable source for new coordinators trying to locate companies in their area. A comprehensive list of national internship and research opportunities is also updated and made available to Alliance members and BMES each year. In addition to the personal guidance that our more experienced coordinators can offer new programs, we have developed a set of written aids that are useful as coordinators and programs get off the ground.

Feedback and Results

The annual BMES meeting provided an excellent opportunity to recruit new Alliance members, train existing coordinators and to gather feedback from our members. We used this opportunity to learn more about how might better serve our Alliance. In addition, an on-line survey was developed to get a better understanding of our member demographics. This coordinator survey indicates that the majority of our members place between 5 and 20 internships or co-op students per year. Most respondents see the Alliance as a way to expand their local programs and a resource for placing students in out of state opportunities.

A student survey was sent to over 150 of those who had created or started on line applications. While the formal data is still being compiled, anecdotal evidence suggested that the length of the forms were discouraging some to apply. We have used this information along with suggestions from our members to create a shorter form with optional additional pages. Our on-line resources have been streamlined and features have been added based on suggestions from coordinators and companies.

As of January 2003, over 30 opportunities have been posted directly to the on-line system and over 10 students have been placed both directly and indirectly using the Alliance resources, including internships in CA, OR, and MA with companies such as Bayer and Boston Scientific. Our placement goals for the 2003-2004 year include placing 25 additional students in industry. One positive outcome of our Alliance interaction with industry is evidenced by companies using the Alliance as a recruiting tool. Several permanent positions have also been posted using the Alliance network.

Long-term Goals and Vision

Finding a permanent home for the Alliance, so we can ensure the continuance and consistency of the collaborative effort to place students in meaningful educational opportunities, is our goal. We are currently exploring a formal relationship with BMES and have already found many ways to work together. We expect to work closely in the Career Fair at Fall BMES meeting this year. Preliminary response from our members has been positive for their willingness to help coordinate this event.

The major task is to become self-supporting before grant funds are exhausted. We have proposed several methods for achieving this including charging a nominal membership fee, raising money through efforts such as hosting the BMES career fair or charging a fee to companies interested in recruiting full time employees.

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