



## SPECIAL REPORT: Connecting students to good jobs that **DO** exist

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By John Foren

Mom and Dad prepared Kate Musson for the worst.

Musson, a 20-year-old Plymouth native, figured she'd have to go out of state for a job, maybe to something a family friend lined up for her in Alaska.

Then, [www.InternInMichigan.com](http://www.InternInMichigan.com) came out of left field to keep her in the Great Lakes State.

Now, Kate is ecstatic. Just a few months after graduating early from Hillsdale College, she's completing an internship in marketing at Southgate Surgery Center in downriver Detroit and has been offered a full-time job there.

Plus, she turned down another job offer that came out of the Web site, which is a partnership between the **Detroit Regional Chamber** of Commerce, the West Michigan Strategic Alliance and Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan.

"I would never have found them at all if it wasn't for the Web site," Musson said.

And her parents?

"I think they're just happy I have health benefits ...," she said. "What parent wouldn't be happy that their child can stay home and (not) have to move to another state?"

The Web site is an instructive lesson on how the business community can work with higher education to prepare Michigan's young people for the workforce and keep them here, rather than heading off to places like Chicago or New York.

Fostering a strong relationship between schools and industry is crucial to the state's economic future, experts in the field say.

"It's very important," said Roy Smolky, of Auburn Hills-based DELMIA, a leading software manufacturer for automakers and other industrial giants.

"Boeing is probably our largest customer. They're going to need 20,000 engineers in the next 10 years, and you've got to start mentoring them from high school."

That means students need to learn the same digital design and manufacturing techniques – managing a product from conceptual design through hundreds of digital changes and to fruition -- that industries are using and foresee needing in the future.

And the only way for colleges to do that properly is to work directly with businesses on their curriculum. It's especially important now because major industry – such as the automakers – can't afford to apprentice people for years in a craft. Higher education must take on that load.

"Schools are in the training business. Chrysler and Ford are in the car business," said Smolky, who works in worldwide academic relations for DELMIA and has been involved in a major soon-to-be-announced partnership with Oakland University.

The university will work with DELMIA on an engineering program that will recruit students from local high schools to learn the intricate software design system.

"Our customers are demanding that" kind of training, Smolky said.

Trained as an engineer, he's been in the business for decades and sees ties between education and industry getting better and better, with increasing partnerships.

DELMIA also worked with Mott Community College in Flint in recent years on a manufacturing simulation technology program in response to its need for people skilled in 3-D computer training.

That effort has led to MCC offering a certificate in advanced robotics and simulation.

Macomb Community College heard from local health care agencies who identified a need for certified nursing assistants.

That led to a new program in the field and instant results. Mt. Clemens Regional Medical Center hired 16 of 24 graduates from one class, said Dr. James Sawyer, vice provost for career programs at Macomb. Like many colleges, Macomb depends on advisory boards of local business leaders to give input on its programs and make sure they are promoting real-world skills.

"It's always a challenge to keep business engaged," Sawyer said. "What we've found is when we have programs where they're engaged in the process, we're able to have a much better connection."

The scale of higher education-business partnerships appears to be growing in Michigan, evidenced by IBM's decision to locate an application development center on the campus of Michigan State University.

The facility, announced in January, will work on expanding software for IBM systems used by state government and Michigan companies, helping train MSU students in the process. It's expected to create more than 1,000 direct and indirect jobs over the next five years.

Still, there are pitfalls aplenty.

As schools work more closely with businesses on curriculum, it's important educational institutions understand the intricacies of the industrial world.

"Oftentimes there are a lot of good intentions and not deep enough and broad enough technical knowledge about what's really required between business and education to work well," said Jeffrey Padden, founder and president of Public Policy Associates in Lansing and a workforce development expert.

Plus, Padden said, "the typical linkage between higher education and business is one on one, one business working with a college on solving one skill deficiency. But these problems are often broader. The smarter thing is to work with more than one business."

Musson's case also is illustrative that policymakers can't forget the basics, i.e., just give fresh new talent the name and phone number of someone who will let them get their foot in the door.

That may be all they are looking for, especially – as in Musson's example – after they've been met with rejection after rejection from potential employers.

By the time of her college graduation in May, she was already frustrated and had decided, "If I was going to get a job, I'd have to leave the state."

Kate was put off by more general jobs Web sites, such as careerbuilder.com, because it was hard to sift through the myriad ads to know what was and wasn't credible.

Her anxious mom pushed her to check out **InternInMichigan.com**, which a friend had heard about on the news.

She wrote a profile of herself, detailing her skills and interests, and the site matched her with three companies that fit the criteria. It allowed her to apply to them on the spot and all three – including the Surgery Center – contacted her.

How does she like the work world?

"I love it," she said. "I think my parents were preparing me for some awful job, and this is great. I absolutely love it."

**InternInMichigan.com** is a simple concept, especially when compared to the numerous job-training efforts going on out there, many using federal dollars to bring business, education and policy experts together. Most have cumbersome titles and acronyms that spill off the tongues of wonks but are foreign to anyone whose eyes glazed over during Econ 101.

They are programs that are local, statewide and throughout the country, many involving colleges with highly technical training programs for the workforce of tomorrow.

**InternInMichigan.com** is relatively inexpensive compared to some of those efforts.

Mott Community College spent some \$35 million (in largely federal dollars) to open its Regional Technology Center in 2002. The RTC was designed to work with businesses to prepare students for tech jobs, especially those in neighboring Oakland County.

But the facility has had mixed success as the economy worsened and businesses were hesitant to commit to work with the college on training programs. It's hard to gauge how much of a skilled workforce it has produced, and there's a perception that its 180,000-square-foot space is underused.

By contrast, **InternInMichigan.com** is easy to assess and doesn't cost business or students a dime.

The program is funded by one of the most prominent government job initiatives, the federal Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development. WIRED funds support regional economic and job-training initiatives between business and education and provided \$475,000 for staffing for **Intern In Michigan**. Grants pay for other expenses, such as the technical team hosting and tweaking the site.  
Stopping the brain drain

**Intern In Michigan** grew out the realization that "we're hemorrhaging talent," as Britany Affolter-Caine, director of **InternInMichigan.com**, says.

She notes that the 22-39 year old age group is especially important in driving economic prosperity, spearheading innovations and job growth.

But that's precisely the demographic that Michigan is losing rapidly; Affolter-Caine notes Michigan lost more people in that age group with bachelor's degrees than any other state in the country, except for Louisiana, in 2007.

"We want them to know there are job opportunities in the state of Michigan," she says.

The thinking is if young people stay in-state for an internship, they are more likely to get a permanent job here.

The goal is to produce 25,000 internships in Michigan in the next few years. The Web site just received a \$1.2 million Kellogg Foundation grant to promote the project statewide.

Sounds simple enough. So why hasn't it been tried before?

For a simple reason that strikes at the heart of what's ailed job promotion efforts in the past.

"The problem is getting everybody together to put together the resources to build this thing," Affolter-Caine said. "That kind of collaboration is very new here in Michigan."

The number of placements from the site aren't high so far, but it has garnered strong testimonials.

Steve Goldner, who runs a Farmington Hills firm, Regulatory Affairs Associates, found four unpaid interns from the site. Normally, he said, finding interns is painstaking.

"It's very hard. It's a real pain in the ---," Goldner said.

Using **InternInMichigan.com**, he found his interns this summer in about an hour and a half, he said.

Goldner's main business is geared around getting drugs and medical devices approved by government agencies. But a new division builds medical information Web sites – such as [www.coloncancerresource.com](http://www.coloncancerresource.com) -- to answer basic real-world questions and concerns from patients.

His interns are helping edit and write material, all working online and rarely coming to his office. He hopes to hire the students if business grows.

**InternInMichigan** "helped me fulfill something to help people. It's allowed a basic business to get off the ground," Goldner said.