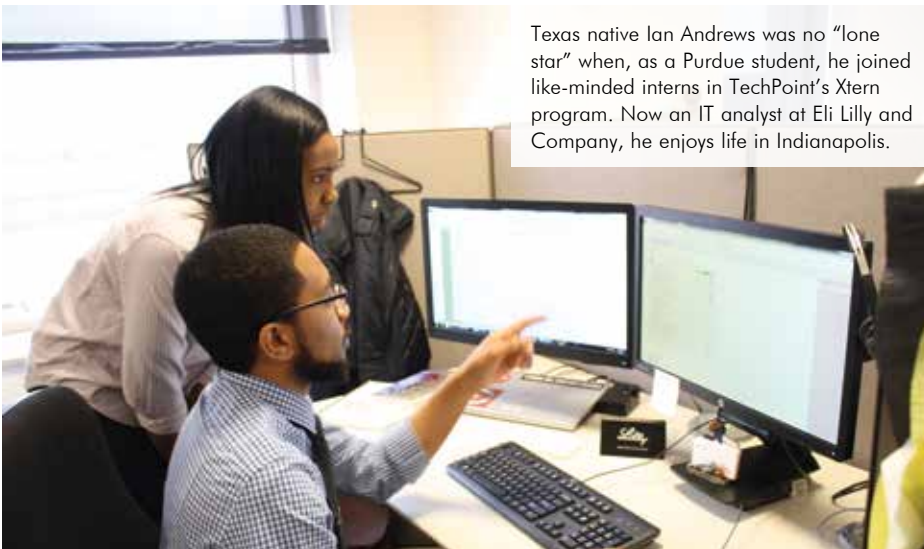


X-FACTOR

Internship Program Showcases Jobs, City

By Matt Ottinger



Texas native Ian Andrews was no “lone star” when, as a Purdue student, he joined like-minded interns in TechPoint’s Xtern program. Now an IT analyst at Eli Lilly and Company, he enjoys life in Indianapolis.

Opening eyes to Indy

The entire Xternship experience is more than employment. Various events and social activities showcase both the city and the local tech community. In fact, building cohesiveness is touted on the Xtern web site: “On your first day of college, you joined a network of students and professionals that will stay with you for the rest of your life. On your first day of Xtern, you will join another one.”

Xterns are housed in downtown Indianapolis apartments with the help of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), and foundation funds help cover program administration and costs. Participating companies do pay a fee in addition to the hourly wages.

“In addition to (internships), we rely on our businesses for both the social programming and professional development,” Flowers explains. “We host tech talks, where we’ll have a group of Xterns go to companies, see their space and learn. The wonderful benefit is that Xterns are exposed not just to the companies they work for, but the larger tech industry as a whole.”

Houston, Texas native Ian Andrews, a computer and information technologies graduate from Purdue University, was essentially a stranger to the Circle City before his Xtern experience at Interactive Intelligence (now Genesys).

The value of internships – for both students and employers – is well documented. TechPoint’s Xtern program, however, goes beyond the job and highlights the experience of living amongst peers and enjoying the many amenities found in Indianapolis and central Indiana.

It’s become a valuable outreach tool to attract talent to the area’s blossoming tech sector.

“Between 2015 and the middle of 2016, 74% of the jobs announced by the (Indiana Economic Development Corporation) were from tech companies,” explains Mike Langellier, TechPoint CEO. “That was a shift that surprised a lot of people. We have to make sure they fulfill that potential.”

In the inaugural campaign in 2014, 50 interns from 10 universities were welcomed into the Xtern program. The latest installment, however, saw over 1,300 applicants from 78 universities (and 40 states) for 150 available spots.

“Our team will visit 30 universities, but the net is far larger,” qualifies Merillat Flowers, TechPoint’s director of College-to-Career

Talent Programs. “We’ve been able to expand our recruitment efforts and use champions who’ve been through the program. We partner with universities in Indiana and take a hands-on approach. We also recruit in neighboring states that are drivable. But as word has spread, our scope has expanded beyond those states.”

And with organizations like Eli Lilly and Company involved, the experiences include more than technology-related positions, with sales and marketing jobs and other opportunities available.



Gayle Ocampo (second from left) enjoys actual “standing meetings” in her software development role at Performance Assessment Network in Carmel. She credits the Xtern program for opening her eyes to the innovative side of central Indiana.

"I didn't have much of an impression of Indianapolis, living in Texas and being in West Lafayette," says Andrews, now working as an IT analyst at Lilly via a tech fellowship. "I'd only visited two or three times."

And now?

"After the program, I think it's great. I really like the city," he explains. "It's very compact, which I like, compared to Houston, which is spread out and it can be difficult and it's more expensive to go to multiple events and experience the city. It's a lot more accessible (here). And living downtown, you can walk around the city, go to the canal, see shows and go to the museums."

Illuminating Indy's merits isn't just reserved for out-of-staters. Noblesville native Gayle Ocampo studied computer science at Butler University, but was still surprised after diving into the local tech community as an Xtern at T2 Systems.

"I didn't think it had as big of a tech scene as it does, and I credit the program for opening my eyes," she offers. "It was nice to know that within central Indiana there were plenty of job opportunities."

She's now a tech fellow and software development engineer for Performance Assessment Network (PAN) in Carmel.

"I'm interested in a leadership position," Ocampo notes.



Xterns like Kathryn Frankewich mentor students each summer at the Butler Lab School through the Code.org Hour of Code.

"Attending different leadership classes in the Xtern program opened my eyes on how to become a better leader by being more efficient and showed me what it really takes to succeed in the business world."

She adds that the TechPoint program exposed her to presentations from entrepreneurs like Interactive Intelligence founder Don Brown and former ExactTarget chief Scott Dorsey.

"Dorsey spoke a lot about the culture and how important it is for the company to succeed," Ocampo relays.

X-cellent for business

Matt Tyner, vice president of finance and operations for marketing personalization platform company SmarterHQ, was well aware of the program during its inception while serving on TechPoint's talent committee. SmarterHQ enthusiastically remains one of more than 50 participating companies.

"We've hosted 11 Xterns in three years," he reports, noting the diversity of roles in which the interns have served. "Five of the 11 worked with us full time or part time following the internship. Of those five, three were given full-time offers and two have joined the company. That's a very high success rate from a recruiting standpoint for us."

Eric Sendelbach, chief technology officer at MOBI, explains his company hosted one Xtern last year and plans to have two this year. He describes the talent level of its Xtern, an Ohio State University student, as "nothing short of remarkable."

"To be honest, I wasn't even aware this level of talent existed at the intern level ...," he elaborates about the intern, who recently became a full-time staffer. "This is funny, but he was assisting to train and mentor the rest of our intern class."

The recruitment strategy also presents a unified front of sorts for Indiana businesses as they collectively reach out to the brightest minds.

"I think it creates economies of scale that we wouldn't otherwise have," Tyner asserts. "We can't go to career fairs and markets where there's talent and be relevant as a 65-person company looking for one or two hires in a particular business unit of the firm. But when you combine 50 to 100 job opportunities together and set up a booth alongside Apple, Google and Oracle, you automatically become competitive."

He also credits TechPoint for doing "the heavy lifting."

"For the number of applicants they get, they do a very good job of vetting those people, so on the Xtern finalist day, we're picking from the cream of the crop," Tyner surmises. "That saves us a ton of time and guarantees the program a higher success rate because the people that come work for us as Xterns are great people and very talented hires."

Moving forward

While the program is proving to be an archetype and a boon for the tech sector, Langellier explains successful implementation meant overcoming challenges.

"It has to serve a critical mass of companies," he points out. "We asked, 'Can we get consensus among a broad swathe of companies to participate? Can we take something that's a competitive exercise like talent recruitment and turn it into a collaborative strategy?' That's something we can be proud of in Indiana – that we have a spirit of collaboration, and they'll come together on something bigger than their own selfish interests."

Recruiting enough qualified candidates is also imperative.

"Because Indianapolis does not yet have that well-known brand of being a tech hub like Silicon Valley or Austin (Texas), it can require changing hearts and minds to attract talent here for one summer of their lives."

Based on the notable growth, the Xtern program is on point when it comes to building a better Indianapolis. But can it ultimately expand beyond the capital city?

"We're in early discussions now (with other communities)," Langellier reveals. "But because there's housing, company involvement, and you have to execute events, it can't be done on a statewide basis right out of the gate. But we have had a number of organizations and individuals from places like West Lafayette, Bloomington, Fort Wayne and Evansville who think there could be an opportunity to develop something similar."

"The ultimate success is that the talent pipeline and talent pool we're building is among the best in the country," he concludes. "Talent can also be a strategy to attract companies, and it's an asset to students in our universities, and it helps our partners create an exceptional education experience for their students."

RESOURCES: Ian Andrews and Gayle Ocampo, Indy Tech Fellowship, at www.techpoint.org/techfellowship | Merillat Flowers and Mike Langellier, TechPoint, at www.techpoint.org | Eric Sendelbach, MOBI, at www.mobium.com | Matt Tyner, Smarter HQ, at www.smarterhq.com | Xtern program at www.xtern.me