

# **General Motor's Sullivan Fellowship : A Model for University Industry Partnership**

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## **Abstract**

This paper compares and contrasts the experience of students and administrator in two different internship programs: the Sullivan Fellow Program at General Motors (GM) and the Microsoft internship program. The main difference between these programs is that GM requires the university to participate in the program by attending meetings at GM, mentoring the Sullivan fellow and creating a workshop or course to disseminate information about the Global Sullivan Principles[1]. One will see from the experience of the students and the administrator that by requiring the institution as well as the student to participate a deeper relationship is formed between the university and the industrial partner.

The GM Sullivan fellowship is a partnership between GM and United Negro College fund (UNCF). Universities are invited to apply for this program. It consists of an internship for a student and a workshop or course on the Sullivan principles given at the home University of the student. In order to facilitate the development of the course GM holds a workshop in April to introduce the fellows and the successful university mentors to GM and to the Sullivan principles. The main purpose of this program is to promote the work of Dr Leon Sullivan and the Global Sullivan Principles. In addition to gaining experience in a GM facility, the intern gains experience in critiquing the application of the Global Sullivan Principles by writing and presenting a report which discusses compliance of these principles to his or her work environment. The fellow also helps in the preparation and delivery of the workshop on campus. The pre-internship workshop on the Sullivan principles, the fellow presentation of their reports on the compliance with these principles and the creation and delivery of the workshop allow the University to develop a deeper relationship and understanding of GM.

In contrast the Microsoft internship is a traditional internship where the student is selected by a recruiter and develops a relationship with the company. The home institution of the student is not involved so they do not even know who is participating in an internship. This type of internship does not increase the familiarity of the institution with the company.

## **GM Sullivan Internship**

Institutions are invited to apply for this program. The application consists primarily of the description of the workshop or course which will be created if the institution is chosen to participate in the Sullivan internship. Once a university is selected by GM for a Sullivan intern then the university works with a member of the talent acquisition team from GM to select the fellow. Like all interns at GM, the Sullivan fellows must submit an application and complete an on line assessment. The university and GM select a candidate who is agreeable to both of them. This selection process forces the university mentor to be involved with the intern from the beginning.

As part of the program both the university mentor and the intern agree to attend a training session on the Sullivan Principles. In the spring of 2008 this was held from the evening of April 21 through April 23. The training session offers the opportunity for the participants to learn about the Sullivan principles which is related to the recent history of GM. Dr Leon Sullivan served on the GM board of directors from Jan 1971 until May 1993. He is the first African American to serve on the board of directors of a fortune 500. His principles are the result of his work on civil rights

issues in the United States and his work with GM concerning fair labor practices in the United States and abroad. He was especially concerned with the practices in apartheid South Africa [2]. These principles have been adopted by many businesses including GM. (For a complete list of companies please see the Sullivan foundation website.) These principles form the basis of the corporate values held by GM. They can be found in a document which is given to all employees entitled “Winning with Integrity – Our Values and Guidelines for Employee Conduct”[3] Through the pre-internship workshop the participants (both interns and mentors) learn about the corporate culture at GM. Since it was held at GM one also had a brief tour of World headquarters and a tour of an assembly plant. In addition to the training there are opportunities to interact with the university relations people in talent acquisition as well as the university reps for the individual institution. This internship program is quite small. In 2008, there were seven Sullivan Fellows.

The fellows complete a 10-14 week internship. In addition to completing the work of the internship they give two presentations. One is related to the compliance of the organization to the Sullivan principles. This is given at GM world headquarters and the mentors were invited. This is another opportunity to strengthen the relationship with the company. The other is a basic overview of the student, the work assignment and what was learned from the internship. This is presented to the plant manager and area managers.

The Harvard University Sullivan Fellow, Katie Grosteffon when asked to reflect on her internship at GM and the importance of the Sullivan fellowship components she writes the following.

*“Attending the workshop in April and then writing the report and presenting on the Sullivan Principles allowed me to look at my internship in a different way than the other interns, I think. While I was focused the whole time on my job, having the Sullivan Principles at the back of my mind helped me notice more things. I paid attention to the Union reps, interaction between management and hourly workers, and how the Union rep was a liaison between the two sometimes. When people were complaining or just talking, some things they said would stick in my mind because they related to a Sullivan Principle. I absorbed so much of what was going on around me - I might have anyway, out of curiosity, but because I had the Sullivan Principles in the back of my mind, I was able to understand my interactions from a social justice point of view. I observed the conflict between constant demands to make production, to turn a profit, to not waste money, managing hundreds of people while still trying to give everyone input into their work lives. Also, doing the presentation at the RenCen (world headquarters) was great because it provided an opportunity to get away from the production and at least get a glimpse into corporate. Also, it made me feel important. The Sullivan component of my internship shaped the way I experienced GM.”*

This quote demonstrates the importance and perceived difference of the Sullivan Fellowship to the internship experience. First of all, knowing the corporate values allows Katie to think more deeply and critically about how well her unit is complying with them. In this case GM bases its corporate values on the Sullivan principles but in general this type of an exercise could be accomplished by educating the intern on the corporate values and asking them to critique them. Second, the fact that this program is selective and has a report which is delivered in the corporate headquarters makes the students feel important. The students are encouraged to find areas where the GM could improve its compliance and to suggest ways to improve them. This exercise empowers the students.

From a University point of view this program has several benefits. The first is that the university is involved in the selection of the intern so they know who the intern is. This allows them to develop a better relationship with the intern. Second, there is an opportunity for a person from the university to learn more about the corporation and its values through the training on the Sullivan Principles. This event also provides an opportunity to meet recruiters. The creation and delivery of the workshop provide further opportunities for university administrator and the all students in the university to learn about the corporation. Approximately 20 students participated in the four Sullivan workshops given throughout the fall. Many went to two or more of the workshops.

This year as part of the Sullivan program, Harvard School of engineering and applied sciences created four work-

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shops related to the Sullivan principles. Each workshop lasted two to three hours. The students in Engineers without Borders (EWB) attended these seminars. The first two workshops had a modest attendance of around 7. The last two had an attendance of approximately 20.

Workshop I This workshop started by discussing who is Reverend Sullivan, what are the Sullivan principles and why did he create them. It continued with a case study of the compliance of GM Detroit-Hamtrack assembly plant with the Sullivan Principles. This is the plant where Katie worked as an intern. The final part of the discussion was dedicated to a discussion of the student perception of Harvard's compliance with the Sullivan Principles.

Workshop II This workshop focused on Harvard's recent past with the living wage events. There was consider attention to the salaries that Harvard pays its janitorial, dining, and facilities staff in the spring of 2001. In this workshop the book Harvard Works Because We Do [4] helped frame the discussion. The labor issues flared up again with a hunger strike in the spring of 2007. Given that one student went to the hospital during this event in 2007 many of the current students know of the living wage campaign but they do not understand the border context. The co-director of Harvard's Student Labor Action Movement (SLAM) joined the workshop to provide background information about the hunger strike and labor issues at Harvard. The students were asked to read the book Nickel and Dimed [5] before the meeting to have a broader context for the discussion of a living wage. The workshop participants discussed if either side of this argument could have achieved the same results (or better) by trying to getting the university to adopt the Global Sullivan principles.

Workshop III In this session the students in EWB discussed the Sullivan Principles in light of their work on clean water in Constanza in the Dominican Republic. They chose four of the Sullivan principles, 1, 5, 7 and 8 to investigate during their trip in January.

Workshop IV After the EWB students returned from Constanza, they gave a presentation concerning the compliance of the group with the four chosen Sullivan principles.

In contrast the Microsoft internship has no university involvement. This is fairly standard for internship. The details and benefits of the program may vary slightly but by in large the majority of programs do not involve the universities in as substantial a way as the Sullivan Fellowship

### **Microsoft Internship**

Every year Harvard has several students who participate in this program. In the summer of 2008 there were 16 interns from Harvard in technical division. Since the institution is not involved in the selection of the interns there is no way to know how many or who is selected unless one asks a Microsoft recruiter.

The internships are 12 weeks. All interns set commitment goals within the first two weeks. At 6 weeks they have a midpoint review and then at 12 weeks a final review with their Hiring Manager. All interns have a mentor from Microsoft as well as manager. No presentation is required but some groups do have interns give a final presentation to showcase their project.

As far as the orientation held for the internship a student described it as a few hours in the morning, where they discussed some basics about Microsoft (e.g. the divisions), IP issues, confidentiality, professional conduct, payroll, etc. They did not explicitly talk about the corporate values nor did they as the interns to reflect on the compliance of the individual units with these values

### **Conclusion**

The vast majority of engineering student internships does not directly enhance the relationship of the university with

the company. The Sullivan Fellowship offers a model for a program which does. In the summer of 2008 Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (HSEAS) had one GM Sullivan fellow. Through the pre-internship training, the Sullivan Fellow report, the creation and delivery of the workshop on campus, the intern, fellow students and the university learned a lot about GM. In contrast HSEAS had 16 students at Microsoft. These 16 learned about Microsoft during their experience but they did not necessarily learn about the corporate values. The institution including its students did not learn through this internship.

Although not all companies are committed to the Global Sullivan Principles, they all have a set of corporate values. They could develop programs similar to the one described here to incorporate these into the training and responsibility of the internship. By adding this feature one can enhance the internship experience for the student as well as the home institution of the student.

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### **Appendix: The Sullivan principles**

01. Express our support for universal human rights and, particularly, those of our employees, the communities within which we operate, and parties with whom we do business.
02. Promote equal opportunity for our employees at all levels of the company with respect to issues such as color, race, gender, age, ethnicity or religious beliefs, and operate without unacceptable worker treatment such as the exploitation of children, physical punishment, female abuse, involuntary servitude, or other forms of abuse.
03. Respect our employees' voluntary freedom of association.
04. Compensate our employees to enable them to meet at least their basic needs and provide the opportunity to improve their skill and capability in order to raise their social and economic opportunities.
05. Provide a safe and healthy workplace; protect human health and the environment; and promote sustainable development.
06. Promote fair competition including respect for intellectual and other property rights, and not offer, pay or accept bribes.
07. Work with governments and communities in which we do business to improve the quality of life in those communities – their educational, cultural, economic and social well-being – and seek to provide training and opportunities for workers from disadvantaged backgrounds.
08. Promote the application of these principles by those with whom we do business.