



ITAP: Information Technology Associates Program

DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana

What is it?

Launched in 2001, DePauw University's Information Technology Associates Program (ITAP) is a selective, four-year honors program that provides special opportunities for students to develop advanced skills in a wide range of information technologies. This initiative is one of several funded through a \$20 million grant from the Eli Lilly Endowment. With the ITAP initiative, DePauw's objective is to prepare students—regardless of their majors or career aspirations—for the team-based work environments that await them after graduation, where interpersonal skills are at least as important as technical fluency.

Talented students are selected for the program based on their enthusiasm for learning new skills and their desire to master the latest technologies. For four years, these ITAP interns are immersed in real-life working environments both on and off campus in ways that benefit the students, the university, and the region's business community. Interns spend an average of 8 to 10 hours per week in training and job-related activities, sharpening their technical and leadership skills while earning wages higher than typical minimum wages for work-study programs. Because student interns participate in ITAP over the course of their entire college careers, the university is able to draw on a reliable pool of talented, well-trained, and affordable workers.

Four years after the program began, ITAP has grown from 60 to 160 students, and the first cohort has graduated. As a measure of the initiative's success, all ITAP alumni were either accepted into the graduate school of their choice or hired by their preferred employer within six months of graduation.

What problem does it solve?

Institutions that have historically placed a premium on service learning, internships, and honors programs to provide their students with broad preparation for life after graduation are now considering the implications of IT and the role that information fluency will play in the personal and professional lives of their students. The internship approach to advanced IT training addresses three key areas of concern for students:

- **Professional development:** Student interns are engaged in team-building workshops, given opportunities to work directly with clients, asked to mentor younger peers, and exposed to a range of professional development issues, including project management, time and stress management, and effective communication.

- **Financial support:** A paid internship alleviates some of the financial concerns that most college students have. Moreover, graduates who have extensive experience as interns have a competitive advantage when they enter the job market.
- **Time management:** Internships allow students to combine a wage-earning activity with technology training, which many students would otherwise be unable to fit into their schedules.

How did they do it?

ITAP recruits first-year DePauw students with a passion for technology but minimal training and mentors them over the course of their four years of college:

- **Year 1 (Apprentice):** ITAP students, in cohorts of five or six, participate in four six-week training rotations with key campus IT groups. This first year exposes them to the entire gamut of IT services, including digital video/audio production, Web design, information analysis, desktop and network hardware, and client support.
- **Year 2 (Associate):** Students participate as associates in semester- or year-long on-campus internships, working closely with faculty and IT professionals. At the end of their apprenticeship year, students are presented with an authentic job search experience. Open ITAP associate positions are advertised in a compilation similar to a newspaper's job listings. Students are responsible for composing résumés and cover letters, setting up interviews, and formally accepting a job. Once immersed in their new role, students gain hands-on, real-world experience and sharpen their technical and leadership skills.
- **Year 3 (Advanced Associate):** During their third year, students have the option of a semester-long technology internship with an off-campus employer. Personal interactions with clients help them develop lifelong professional behaviors, making them more marketable for future careers. During the 2003–2004 academic year, more than 30 students took advantage of off-campus

employment, while the remainder of the ITAP associates continued to work on campus, moving to more advanced projects.

- **Year 4 (Senior Mentor):** Senior students work on the most important and sophisticated technology projects on campus, while serving as mentors to younger ITAP associates and leaders of ITAP.

Nine DePauw departments known as “apprentice training sites” play host to student interns during their first year. Each training site represents a different technological focus and equips students to use a different set of fundamental technologies. This program structure involves commitment on the part of individual campus units and entails certain operational challenges:

- **Resource allocation:** Staff resources are required to coordinate scheduled ITAP-related program events, speakers, and career workshops.
- **Work balance:** Campus training sites that host student interns must develop meaningful work-study experiences without compromising the quality of their day-to-day services.
- **Student management:** Campus training sites are responsible for the administrative management of 10–15 students, including scheduling work times, processing time cards, encouraging participation in required events, assessing student skill levels, assigning students to projects, monitoring project progress, and acclimatizing students to a professional working environment.
- **Faculty reticence:** Many campus employers, including DePauw’s Faculty Instructional Technology Support (FITS) unit, serve faculty clients who may be uncomfortable seeking assistance from student consultants.

In general, the DePauw apprentice training sites deal with these challenges by leveraging the experience of veteran ITAP associates, who are assigned to mentor first-year interns and serve as a buffer between full-time staff and apprentices when issues arise and need to be resolved in an informal manner. Over time, the competence and reliability of student interns removes much of the unease that some faculty have with student consultants.

Why is it noteworthy?

ITAP contains several noteworthy features benefiting both the students and the institution:

- **Open to all majors:** ITAP is open to students from all majors who are interested in learning new skills, developing lifelong professional behaviors, and working in a team environment.
- **Comprehensive training:** Six-week training rotations in the first apprenticeship year of the program expose students to a wide range of campus computing groups and a variety of IT applications.
- **Internship opportunities:** Both the internal and external internship programs allow students to develop interpersonal and professional skills that increase their marketability for future careers.
- **Recruitment:** As the prominence of the program grows, ITAP serves as a recruiting device for students and attracts the attention of potential employers.
- **Sustainability:** There is a strong sustainability plan. The university has launched a campaign to endow the program after the grant period expires.

To learn more

Visit the ITAP Web site at

<http://www.depauw.edu/it/itap/index.asp>.

To share your innovation

If your institution has a practice that you believe would be of interest to the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, please share it with us. To submit your innovation for review, please use the ELI Innovations Contribution Form on our Community Exchange page <<http://www.educause.edu/ELICommunityExchange/6797>>. A panel will review your submission and make a recommendation to the ELI staff.

About the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative

The EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (ELI) is a community of higher education institutions and organizations committed to advancing learning through IT innovation. To achieve this mission, ELI focuses on learners, learning principles and practices, and learning technologies. We believe that using IT to improve learning requires a solid understanding of learners and how they learn. It also requires effective practices enabled by learning technologies. We encourage institutions to use this report to broaden awareness and improve effective teaching and learning practice.