



# A Win-Win for Companies and Students

By Ginger White

**T**here's no denying the value that can be gained from student internship programs. Companies get the chance to find future employees and try them out in the work environment, among other benefits. At the same time, the interns gain practical work experience, develop new skills, and enhance their résumés.

For Cummins, Inc., the company where I work, the IMA Student Leadership Conference (SLC) has been a valuable source for finding excellent candidates for student internships. A long-time supporter of the SLC, Cummins began interviewing candidates at the 2010 SLC. It was held in Anaheim, Calif., that year, and I was one of the pioneer recruiters along with Lyndsey Bannick and Beth Christopher. At each SLC since, Cummins has interviewed 15 students for internships. The results have been very positive.

Recruiting student interns at the SLC is a win-win situation. It's a win for the students because they get an

opportunity to interview for an internship with a *Fortune* 150 company, which can be a valuable learning experience even if they don't get an internship. And it's a win for Cummins because we get very good accounting and finance interns. Several IMA SLC students were given full-time positions with Cummins after they completed their internships.

I talked with three former Cummins interns—Rebecca Zhu (CMA pending work experience), Eric Mauer (CMA pending work experience), and Sherita Gregory—to learn more about their experiences at the SLC. Rebecca, who graduated from Eastern Michigan University, attended the 12th Annual IMA SLC in Cincinnati, Ohio, in November 2011. Eric graduated from Purdue University and has attended three different IMA Student Leadership Conferences. And Sherita attended her first IMA SLC in San Antonio, Texas, while she was a junior at Valdosta State University. All three are either working full-time for Cummins or will soon be working in our Cummins



**The 15th Annual Student Leadership Conference** will be held at the Indianapolis Marriott, Indianapolis, Ind., on November 6–8, 2014. Early registration will open September 2 at [www.imastudentconference.org](http://www.imastudentconference.org).

Left: The Cummins booth at the 2013 SLC.

Finance Development Program. Their stories demonstrate that the value of attending the Student Leadership Conference—for the students and for Cummins—extends beyond internships.

## Educational Presentations

Each SLC includes presentations and workshops from leading practitioners that cover a broad range of popular accounting topics, such as International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), ethics, leadership, professional etiquette, and the value of CMA certification. The workshops also provide many useful topics for college students, such as résumé tips, interview skills, and the importance of having a mentor.

Rebecca says, “The Conference was truly an eye opener, and I can’t say enough good things about it.” She was fascinated by the broad range of opportunities within the management accounting profession and came away with valuable career insights.

Eric appreciated that many of the presentations were from people in the professional field instead of those in academia. He notes, “Academics are good to listen to, but in my experiences at college, you tend to get loaded with a lot of academic views. This made hearing from a few people in the working world a lot more insightful to me.”

The sessions Sherita attended provided her with immediate benefits. For example, she attended a data analytics session that demonstrated various platforms and discussed how to use the different software packages and enhance her own skills with them.

This enhanced professional development and exposure

to the latest trends and concepts in the industry provide student attendees with a broader understanding of the profession and the skills needed for success, giving them an advantage over their peers. A couple of reasons Cummins interviews students at the SLC is for the diversity of talent as well as how serious the students being interviewed regard their professional career.

## Networking

For Eric, the most important personal development he gained from his trips to the SLC was learning how to network with strangers in a professional setting. Being slightly introverted, Eric always felt uncomfortable making small talk. He knew this was an area of weakness, and the Conferences he attended were perfect opportunities to practice this skill without any real repercussions. Eric now feels much more at ease making small talk. This may seem relatively unimportant, but the modern office setting increasingly encourages open communication, which makes it truly a vital soft skill if you’re in the business world. For example, when Eric engages in small talk with people in the office, it makes them much more receptive to answering any requests or questions he might have.

Sherita was exposed to different career possibilities in accounting by listening to and interacting with Dell’s vice president of Finance, the controller for Spurs Sports & Entertainment, the CEO of NatureSweet Tomatoes, and various other established leaders. After her internship experience with Cummins, she even went back to the SLC to share her story. “Overwhelmed with joy, I was eager to inspire others by sharing my story with students at the

2013 Conference. During the Conference, I realized that the IMA SLC catered to students of all levels of experience and education. This time around, I spoke with mentors, listened to their paths, asked for advice, and put it to use.”

Rebecca also was able to meet and mingle with a number of people at different events. She took an industrial tour at the Procter & Gamble Corporate Archives and learned about the internal working environment of a manufacturing company. She also participated in a social event at the Newport Aquarium where everyone was randomly assigned a team and had to complete a group project with students from various universities. Rebecca had a great time engaging with these students and professors as well as professionals, academics, and leaders.

Communication is an important aspect of any business. Being able to interact with peers as well as people in various levels of authority or career stage will enhance any intern’s (or employee’s) effectiveness. Because of the networking opportunities offered at each SLC, attendees have more chances to develop this skill. Just as Eric’s experiences helped him succeed in his internships at Cummins, the networking opportunities help attendees bring even greater value to the companies that hire them as interns or employees.

## Career Opportunities

Naturally, all three former interns attest to the value of the SLC as a great place for internship opportunities. When Sherita attended her first SLC, she had only completed a few accounting courses beforehand. Yet, as she notes, “The IMA SLC provided me with an opportunity of a lifetime: a finance internship at Cummins! My Cummins internship provided me with professional experience, accounting experience, and taught me that work should be enjoyable.” Once Sherita’s internship came to an end, she was offered a position in the company’s prestigious Finance Development Program.

After two successful rounds of interviews at the SLC, Rebecca was offered a summer internship position with Cummins. “There is a saying that ‘When opportunity knocks, never hesitate to open the door,’” Rebecca says. She now has a full-time position at Cummins and is always thankful for the interview opportunity she had at the SLC three years ago.

Eric says, “From a career development view, the SLC landed me an internship with a great company, Cummins Inc. I’ve gotten a very wide array of experiences from my two internships and now full-time position within a rotational program at Cummins.” Eric flew on a plane for the

first time in his life during his initial internship at Cummins. In his second internship, he flew to China for his first experience abroad. He’s also had a lot of experience with diverse perspectives because Cummins has employees from many different countries.

The students Cummins has selected for interviews each year have been consistently top notch. Limiting our selection to the few open internship slots at Cummins is sometimes difficult. The fact that Rebecca, Eric, and Sherita have been offered full-time positions at Cummins following their internships is evidence of the kind of quality candidates that can be found at the SLC.

## Everybody Benefits

The IMA Student Leadership Conference is a very good way to meet a diverse group of students with strong educational backgrounds from schools both large and small.

Reflecting back, Rebecca is glad she made the choice to participate in the event. It enabled her to stay informed about the latest accounting industry issues, explore management accounting career options firsthand, and make connections that she still values. Eric agrees with Rebecca and believes the IMA SLC was a great source of growth for him in terms of professional and personal development. From a professional development perspective, Eric’s experiences have changed how he views the world, and he believes he owes it all to attending his first IMA SLC in 2011. Sherita sums it up nicely: “I thoroughly enjoyed my IMA Student Leadership Conferences and am thankful to have gained knowledge, advice, a lifelong career, and enduring opportunities. I hope that every student member will take full advantage of all of the opportunities that IMA provides and have successful stories as well!”

As the lead recruiter for Cummins at the IMA SLC—and as a member of the IMA Global Board of Directors—I couldn’t be more proud of the success stories of the interns and full-time Cummins, Inc. employees we have found at the IMA SLC. The only disappointing thing is that there aren’t more companies sponsoring the IMA SLC and providing other worthy accounting and finance students with internships and full-time jobs. **SF**

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