

## Interns deserve payment



Will Chaney

Many United States students are offered an unfair employment deal — work for no pay. Students know about these programs, called unpaid internships. They often are thought of as innocent programs created to help students and recent graduates, but some of us find them more sinister.

Internships once were an opportunity for potential employees to see what work was like at a particular company without making a major commitment. Although not paid, interns gained experience they could use to develop their skills and build a résumé. There was even the chance of a job offer at the end of the ordeal. However, as the current economic crisis continues to reverberate across our society, companies are relying more and more on interns as a source of free labor.

People aged 18-24 today work as interns in significantly higher numbers than their parents' generation, according to a poll by the National Union of Students and YouGov. The poll shows that 30-40 years ago, only two percent of people in this age bracket became an intern during their lives — now the number is 20 percent. In addition, one in three internships are unpaid, according to the Sutton Trust during November 2014. Instead of offering compensated entry-level jobs to new members of the working class, our economy has transitioned to offering unpaid internships. An angry citizen might ask, "Do unpaid internships violate minimum wage laws?" The courts have ruled in recent lawsuits that many do.

Condé Nast, the corporation that publishes Vanity Fair, The New Yorker and more, recently paid \$5.8 million in a class action lawsuit, according to

- 1 The internship, though it includes actual operation of the facilities of the employer, must be similar to training that would be given in an educational environment.
- 2 The internship experience is for the benefit of the intern.
- 3 The intern does not displace regular employees, but works under close supervision of existing staff.
- 4 The employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern, and on occasion its operations actually might be impeded.
- 5 The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship.
- 6 The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages for the duration spent of the internship.

### Unpaid internships must meet these criteria to be legal

Source: [dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.pdf](http://dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.pdf)

a November 2014 Business Insider. The company agreed it had mistreated 7,500 interns by withholding compensation and shut down its entire internship program after the suit was settled. However nice this might sound to an individual upset about unpaid internships, we must keep in mind the settlement only gives each exploited intern about \$775, according to the same article. This is a laughable sum for the hours interns put in.

In addition to breaking the law, unpaid internships are more feasible for the rich than for the poor. While working for free, interns still require food, water, shelter and so on. Those born into wealthy families find surviving during an unpaid internship a lot easier than those born into lower- and middle-income families who cannot ask their families for assistance. For instance, 74 percent of British families say they cannot afford to send family members to unpaid internships, according to a December 2014 The Guardian article.

Even the benefits we used to get from internships are slipping away. For example, college students are not better off in the job market if they participate in an unpaid internship, according to a report by the National Association of Colleges and Employers during 2013. This report examines the percentage of college graduates who are offered

at least one job upon graduating. The hiring rate for graduates who had completed an unpaid internship was 37 percent, only two percent higher than those who hadn't done an internship.

The people who run our economy tell us internships are a necessary step to enter the workforce, but this simply is not true. Interns do not give away their labor in exchange for a stronger résumé — they are laboring away for much less of a boost than they imagine.

As a Truman student, the pressure to work for free as an intern is very visible — internship advertisements easily are found during a quick walk through any academic building. Our society even praises people who land work as unpaid interns, rewarding them with a pat on the back similar to getting a job. However, we should see unpaid internships for what they are — not as an opportunity, but as a scam put on by companies looking to lower production costs.

*Will Chaney is a freshman economics major from Bridgeton, Mo.*

## AROUND THE QUAD

### Do you think unpaid internships are fair?

Internships should not be as strict if they are unpaid.

Ashley Gaines  
Junior



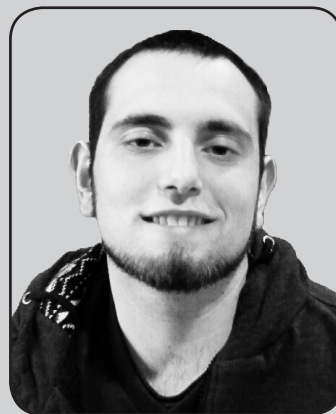
If it's in something you want to do in the future, the experience is fair.

Elizabeth Williams  
Junior



If you're doing quality work, you should get paid for it.

Tyler Chambers  
Sophomore



Some job markets are very competitive, so they can help. In general, it's a little ridiculous.

Meagan McGlasson  
Senior



## Mental illness shouldn't be romanticized



UmmeKulsoom Arif

Someone once told me they wished they had depression because they'd be just like Sylvia Plath. Plath committed suicide by sticking her head in an oven and left behind two small children. That's not something you should aspire toward.

I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety at 13, and while I am by no means an expert on mental illness, I like to think I'm not the only one who hates being told it's "romantic" and "poetic" when I talk about anxiety or depression. A wedding is romantic. A sonnet is poetic. Depression is not.

In another incident, an acquaintance and I got into a spirited debate after he told a mutual friend her schizophrenic hallucinations were visions, and she didn't need to get them treated because they were like superpowers.

These are not isolated incidents. Websites like Tumblr are full of blogs that promote self-harm and suicide, despite violating the website's terms of content rules. Blogs like these often post images of scars from self-harm or fake suicide notes. One of the most popular themes is "thinspiration" that comes with images of skinny bodies and text posts saying, "I hate my thighs" or "I'm fat and worthless." These images and text posts, coupled with societal pressure to maintain a thigh gap, can promote more than just depression or self-harm, but eating disorders as well and even can trigger a post-traumatic episode.

Some might argue that romanticizing mental illness is better than the alternative, which is to stigmatize it, but in fact, these two things

are one and the same. When you make a mental illness seem "cute" or otherwise desirable, you actually trivialize it and make it seem less serious than it really is. This is exactly what stigmatization does. Romanticization of mental illness results in a loss of "safe spaces" for people who legitimately do have a mental illness, as they suddenly feel ashamed of the issues they face and feel as if they have no one to turn to. It almost turns into a guilt-trip as they try to figure out why they're so easily affected by what seems to be such a trivial issue to their friends and family.

The problem with romanticizing things such as self-harm, suicide and mental illness is that it results in a system of non-expert gatekeepers who will question you to determine whether or not you really are depressed, schizophrenic, anorexic or whatever mental illness you've been diagnosed with. It leads to people posting pictures of their self-harm on social media and then others assum-

ing self-harm is okay. Calling people who kill themselves "angels who just want to go home" diminishes the impact of suicide. By using that phrase, you make the family and friends of the deceased feel guilty for wanting them to be on Earth and alive instead of in Heaven and dead.

Others claim that romanticization of mental illness is a form of empathy with the afflicted, but it definitely is not how many people with mental illness interpret it. Instead of hearing someone say "I know how you feel" when I talk about how my depression or how my anxiety is affecting me, I prefer to have someone listen or offer me comfort in the form of a hug or just asking how they can help.

*UmmeKulsoom Arif is a junior justice systems major from St. Louis, Mo.*