



## Real estate internship program benefits everyone

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By Philip Newswanger

For five years, members of the Hampton Roads Association for Commercial Real Estate have offered internships to college students.

Some of them have turned into full-time jobs. That was the case with Grace Cope, an interior designer with HBA Architecture & Interior Design Inc., and Geoff Poston, a sales and leasing associate with Cushman & Wakefield | Thalhimer, a commercial real estate firm. Interns spent four weeks this year with eight firms. Sometimes, they spend seven weeks or more with companies.

Larry Colorito, president of HRACRE and principal with real estate valuation and consulting firm Axial Advisory Group LLC, said from eight to 13 companies each year have accepted interns over the past five years. "As part of our mission, HRACRE started this program to provide a resource for young people interested in getting into commercial real estate," he said.

"The program provides them an opportunity to gain experience in the industry while still in college. It also promotes the industry in Hampton Roads." HRACRE is the facilitator of the program.

"Most of the employers participate as a way to give back to the industry and the community," Colorito said. "But feedback has shown that many find that a strong summer intern can be a useful part of their business. The interns are typically assigned small projects or help with the day-to-day workload that can get overbearing in the summer while full-time employees take vacation. In the end, we hope to benefit the community by providing a resource to help keep our best and brightest young people in Hampton Roads after college."

The experiences of Poston and Cope were different, although both internships were practical and led to full-time jobs after graduating from college - and both Poston and Cope were paid an hourly wage by their companies during their internships.

"The internship was very practical," said Poston, who attended Hampden-Sydney College and transferred to Old Dominion University. "Entering into the commercial real estate industry can be daunting. To be successful you have to be knowledgeable about anything and everything regarding real estate, from investment and development to LEED certification.

"The more you know, the more value you can offer to a potential client," Poston said. "The HRACRE internship introduced me to all of these concepts and has really been of great benefit. Instead of being cold to the industry, I was somewhat familiar when I joined Thalhimer full-time this summer."

Poston's internship lasted seven weeks, from June to July. "We met at a new location every month where we enjoyed a free lunch and listened to a featured speaker or speakers," Poston said. "Each lunch meeting focused on a specific theme.

"The presentation at the Wells Fargo building, given by Thomas Johnson of S.L. Nusbaum Realty, covered building development, from site selection to completion of construction," Poston said. Johnson managed the development and construction of the Wells Fargo Center, a city block of garages, offices and future apartments and shops.

The presentation the interns attended at the Armada Hoffler building was given by Michael Divaris, president of Divaris Real Estate. He spoke about the growth and development of Town Center in Virginia Beach, a joint venture between Divaris and Armada Hoffler.

Craig Cope, vice president of Liberty Property Trust, gave the presentation at 1317 Executive Blvd., a LEED - or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design - certified building owned and managed by Liberty. "He informed us about LEED certification and the benefits of being at the first LEED-certified building in Chesapeake," Poston said.

"The Virginia Beach Economic Development meeting was specifically concerned with planned strategic growth areas," he said. "This was a very interesting meeting - probably my favorite of the entire internship. It was amazing to me to see the level of detail and foresight that goes into city planning."

The final meeting took place at the World Trade Center in downtown Norfolk, where the interns received certificates of completion.

Grace Cope, who graduated from Virginia Tech with a B.S. in interior design, spent two summers with HBA as well as winter breaks during both years. I was hired as a student interior design intern and worked under HBA's head interior designer, Maxine Baer," Cope said. "My tasks were varied and included drafting construction documents, picking out project finishes, gathering LEED documentation, and creating project documents for clients."

Cope, who is the daughter of Craig Cope of Liberty Property Trust, explained one of her responsibilities as an intern. "My first summer with HBA I was in charge of picking out finishes and drawing construction documents for a bathroom renovation in a local church," she said. It was the perfect task to start out with as a new designer because it covered many aspects of a professional design project but on a very small scale."

On this project she learned how to use AutoCAD through the creation of floor plans, elevations and details of the restrooms. "Knowing how to use the drafting programs is an important part of my job, so it was crucial that I learned how to use AutoCAD that summer.

"My internship provided me with fantastic professional experience. I learned many relevant lessons, including how to draft and lay out drawings using AutoCAD and Revit, how to work and communicate with fellow employees, and that picking out the perfect paint color is much trickier than it would appear.

"I have been prepared exceptionally well for my job considering I am still working for the same company. I had a great education at Virginia Tech, but there are so many aspects of the professional world that my classes were unable to cover," Cope said. "I am thankful for my internship for it allowed an easy transition from intern to full-time employee."

Applications for internships are posted on HRACRE's website at [HRACRE.org](http://HRACRE.org) and in the career offices of many Virginia universities.

"The program is open to any college student interested in commercial real estate," Colorito said. "Most of the interns either live or go to school in Hampton Roads. The typical intern has just finished their junior year although we do get some seniors if they don't yet have full-time employment."