



Jason Ruiter



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# AdventHealth Virtual Internship

## During the Pandemic Brings Many Benefits

While many companies canceled summer internship opportunities in 2020 due to COVID-19, AdventHealth<sup>1</sup> created a virtual experience that exposed interns to a wide array of leaders and opportunities.

Tanner Toay,<sup>2</sup> a senior studying business administration at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, was disappointed when his summer internship with a healthcare system was canceled due to COVID-19. But when he heard from AdventHealth, a system of 50 hospitals that serves five million patients annually throughout the United States, and its offer of a virtual internship that would expose him to a wide breadth of healthcare knowledge, he jumped at the chance. “A lot of the people I know had their internships canceled,” he said. “AdventHealth was the first one to really offer a solid program.”

The summer internship program at AdventHealth is not new. For many years, it has offered as many as 50 to 55 undergraduates from Adventist colleges and universities an opportunity to become embedded within the organization in areas ranging from finance and accounting to nursing, IT, and marketing. These final 50 or so students, from a pool of more than 300 applicants, are offered paid intern-

ship positions at US\$15 an hour for approximately seven hours a day for six weeks. Through the program, they are assigned projects, paired with executive mentors and preceptors, and take part in a variety of social and spiritual events. The limitations imposed by COVID-19, however, made it difficult for the program to proceed in its usual format, so it became necessary to replace the usual travel and accommodations with virtual access.

According to a recent survey, 35 percent of 900 U.S. college students had their internships canceled because of the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> With many students missing out on key opportunities to develop future careers during the summer, a few companies pivoted from an in-person to a virtual curriculum. AdventHealth leaders were determined to find the right solution for their company while keeping two considerations in mind: how to ensure the safety of the interns, staff, and preceptors, and how to fulfill the promise that had been made to the interns. Ultimately, the decision to proceed in a virtual format was driven by the health system’s key values and made at the very top by President and CEO Terry Shaw, who felt the organization had made a moral commitment to its interns.

To ensure the interns’ safety and education needs once the decision was made, AdventHealth abridged its internship program from 12 weeks to

six weeks and went entirely digital. The program launched June 22, 2020, and concluded July 31, 2020.

“It felt a bit more like a television production,” said Ken Bradley, director of the emerging leaders program at AdventHealth’s Leadership Institute, describing the changes made to facilitate the virtual internship program. “The quality of the work was incredible.”

Technology naturally played a major role in the pivot. To facilitate the new format, the Leadership Institute’s team underwent online training sponsored by Franklin Covey, a global provider of leadership training and consulting, and set up a production team with a daily producer, a consistent “on-air” host, and staff coordinators who monitored the open chat feed, as well as a private chat that allowed for real-time production adjustments. At the end of each day, the team met to review their successes and opportunities for improvement to ensure they were adequately prepared for the next session. In the end, they found that the digital tools made it easy to connect the interns to their daily meetings and projects and to one another.

“I think something that’s really unique with virtual internships is the ability to quickly break out into groups,” Toay said of his experience. “If you tried to do that in person, it’d be just chaos. It’d be like musical chairs.”

The 55 young adult interns were evenly split in terms of gender, represented 12 education institutions and 42 majors, and had an average GPA of 3.5. About half, 55 percent, were juniors in college, 14 percent were seniors, 4 percent were graduates, and 2 percent were freshman. As a group, they listened to daily devotions, presentations,

and leadership lessons from AdventHealth clinicians and leaders via a Zoom meeting and were placed by the proctor into virtual “breakout rooms” where they grappled with questions posed by the guest speakers.

Ted Hamilton, MD, chief mission-integration officer for AdventHealth, referred to the company’s mission statement “Extending the Healing Ministry of Christ” when he spoke during one Thursday morning meeting. “Patient care does not demand that we have a mission and ministry,” he said during the call. “So, why do we do this?” The interns were then placed into virtual groups where they discussed possible answers.

Bradley said that thanks to the ease-of-use of virtual meetings, many executives were able to provide an hour of their time to speak to the interns. That included Mark Hertling, a physician leadership consultant for AdventHealth and former commanding general of the U.S. Army, and Jeffrey Kuhlman, MD, AdventHealth senior vice president of clinical quality and patient safety, and former White House physician.

Toay said he loved the exposure. In addition to their seminars, he and the other interns paired up with one another to interview leaders across the system about the company’s response to COVID-19. Called *Project Insight*, the endeavor was tasked to the interns by Shaw. “I liked the openness of the project,” Toay said. “Because executives’ feedback was collected anonymously, I feel that as an intern you got to hear candidly.”

As part of their self-led work, the interns managed their own time to complete online training courses, take virtual tours, participate in résumé reviews and mock interviews with AdventHealth’s talent acquisition team, and to develop personal video submissions and a group presentation to be showcased during the annual intern expo (see Box 1 on page 32 for an example of the schedule of activities during week one).

At the end of the six weeks, each

participant was evaluated by his or her assigned preceptor and/or resident advisor in a discussion covering ways the intern brought value to the company and department, and areas that could be improved upon. In turn, feedback received from the interns—in the form of both survey and anecdotal evaluations—helped the Leadership Institute team assess the program’s effectiveness. Organizers found that:

- One hundred percent of the interns believed the virtual internship had helped to develop them as leaders;
- Ninety-eight percent believed they had acquired the necessary capabilities to contribute to AdventHealth’s mission; and
- Ninety-two percent were interested in a career with the organization—an especially promising statistic, as one of the key metrics for AdventHealth’s summer internship

program is the number of future and permanent hires it produces.

The AdventHealth summer internship program aims to answer three questions for its interns: Is the healthcare field right for them? Is AdventHealth the right employer for them? And if it is, in what area of healthcare would they like to work? These questions are discussed with interns throughout the program, as they are exposed to real-world experiences and meet with top leaders, and then answered during the final interview with their preceptor.

Toay, who was embedded in a finance project as part of his internship, said he learned how AdventHealth, at every turn, goes back to its mission of Extending the Healing Ministry of Christ in its decision-making. “I think I’m very much leaning toward, ‘I would like to work for AdventHealth,’” he said. ✍



## Box 1. Example of Week 1

2020 Summer Internship Schedule  
Presented by the Leadership Institute  
"Leading in Crisis"

**Week 1 - Welcome to AdventHealth**  
Prework: 1. Complete and Download CliftonStrengths Assessment; 2. Set up your virtual workspace

Self-led work: 1. Assigned ALN Orientation Curriculum; 2. Virtual tours using VR Cardboard Slims

Session	Time (EST)	Objectives	Speakers, Titles	Location
Monday, June 22, 2020	9:30am - 10:45am	Welcome - Opening Remarks	Ken Bradley, Director of Emerging Leaders Program	Zoom
	10:45am-11:00am	Break		
	11:00am-12:00pm	A Patient's Story	An interview with Roy Reid, Executive Director of Public Affairs Communication; Facilitated by Sy Saliba, Director of Leadership Institute	Zoom
	12:00pm -1:00pm	Lunch Break		
	1:00pm -2:30pm	Intern Introductions   Ice Breaker	Sy Gallimore, Physician Enterprise Resident	Zoom
Tuesday, June 23, 2020	2:30pm -3:00pm	Break		
	3:00pm-4:00pm	Keynote - State of AdventHealth	Gina Creek, Executive Director of Leadership Institute to introduce our Keynote speaker Randy Haffner, President/CEO, Multi-State Division	Zoom
	4:00pm	Adjourn		
Tuesday, June 23, 2020	10:00am -10:45am	An Introduction to Spiritual Formation	Jay Perez, VP Institutional Ministries	Zoom
	10:45am-11:00am	Break		
	11:00am-12:00pm	Wrestling With Hard Decisions	Ken Bradley, Director of Emerging Leaders Program	Zoom
	12:00pm -1:00pm	Lunch Break		
	1:00pm -2:00pm	Emerging Leaders Panel	Facilitated by Veronica Garcia-Carvajal, West Florida Division Accounting   Finance Resident. The panel will include: Brielyn Sampson, Director, Corporate Responsibility; Arleni Calderon, Director, Supply Chain; Elijah Bruette, Executive Director, Business Development Strategic Planning; Emily Johnson, Director, Finance; and Zachary Crane, Director, Anesthesia Operations	Zoom
Wednesday, June 24, 2020	2:00pm -2:15pm	Break		
	2:15pm-3:00pm	Your Internship Experience	Ken Bradley, Director of Emerging Leaders; Gina Creek, Executive Director, Leadership Institute; Angela Sechrest, Coordinator, Emerging Leaders	Zoom
	3:00pm-3:15pm	Break		
	3:15pm-4:00pm	AdventHealth Jeopardy	Sy Gallimore, Physician Enterprise Resident	Zoom
Wednesday, June 24, 2020	4:00pm	Adjourn		
	10:00am-10:30am	Devotional - Leadership Lessons from Peter	Andrew Taylor, AdventHealth Orlando Accounting Finance Resident	Zoom
	10:30am-12:00pm	Internship   Professional Etiquette	Amanda Kukich, Director, Finance; Jordan Couch, Director of Hospital Services	Zoom
	12:00pm -1:00pm	Lunch Break		
Thursday, June 25, 2020	1:00pm -3:30pm	Introduction to the Pandemic Crisis	Ken Bradley, Director of Emerging Leaders; Gina Creek, Executive Director, Leadership Institute; Amanda Maggard, President/CEO AdventHealth Zephyrhills; Rob Deininger, President/CEO, AdventHealth Fish; Danielle Johnson, VP COO, AdventHealth Fish	Zoom
	3:30pm	Adjourn		
	10:00am-10:30am	Devotional - Leadership Lessons from Joshua	Astrid Monroig-Negron, Corporate Responsibility Resident	Zoom
	10:30am-11:00am	Department Foundations Introduction	Ken Bradley, Director of Emerging Leaders	Zoom
	11:00am-12:00pm	Department Foundations - Management & Operations	Hayden Palm, Shawnee Mission Management Resident	Zoom
Thursday, June 25, 2020	12:00pm -1:00pm	Lunch Break		
	1:00pm-2:00pm	Department Foundations - Supply Chain	Olesia Korchuk, Supply Chain Resident	Zoom
	2:00pm-3:00pm	Department Foundations - Marketing & Strategy	Ashley Seymour, Marketing and Strategic Planning Resident	Zoom
	3:00pm -3:30pm	Break		
	3:30pm-4:30pm	Department Foundations - Physician Enterprise	Natasha McWilliams-Nasser, Physician Enterprise Resident	Zoom
Friday, June 26, 2020	4:30pm	Adjourn		
	9:00am-10:00am	Leadership Lessons - Sy Saliba	Sy Saliba, Director Program Development	Zoom
	10:00am-12:00pm	CliftonStrengths: What Is Your Superpower?	Gina Creek, Executive Director, Leadership Institute	Zoom
	12:00pm -1:00pm	Lunch Break		
Friday, June 26, 2020	1:00pm-2:30pm	Weekend Wrap Up	Leah Wooten, Management Resident	Zoom
	2:30pm	Adjourn		

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**Ingrid Hernandez, MS**, is a *Stakeholder Communications Manager at AdventHealth.* She holds a Master of Science in Communication from Purdue University (West Lafayette, Indiana, U.S.A.), and a bachelor's degree in public relations and business administration from Southern Adventist University (Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A.). Ms. Hernandez's prior experiences include Senior Communications Specialist for AdventHealth, as well as several other communications and marketing roles.

#### Recommended citation:

**Jason Ruiter and Ingrid Hernandez**, "AdventHealth Virtual Internship During the Pandemic Brings Its Own Benefits," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 82:4 (2020): 30-33.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. With a sacred mission of extending the healing ministry of Christ, AdventHealth is a connected system of care for every stage of life and health. More than 80,000 skilled and compassionate caregivers in physician practices, hospitals, outpatient clinics, skilled nursing facilities, home health agencies, and hospice centers provide individualized, holistic care. A shared vision, common values, focus on whole-person health and commitment to making communities healthier unify the system's 50 hospital campuses and hundreds of care sites in diverse markets

throughout almost a dozen states in the U.S. For more information about AdventHealth, visit [AdventHealth.com](http://AdventHealth.com), or [Facebook.com/AdventHealth](https://www.facebook.com/AdventHealth); Staff, "100 of the Largest Hospitals and Health Systems in America," *Becker's Hospital Review* (2020): <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/lists/100-of-the-largest-hospitals-and-health-systems-in-america-2020.html>.

2. Names used with permission.

3. Yello, a recruitment solutions company, partnered with SurveyMonkey to survey 913 current college students in the United States. The survey was conducted from April 10-15, 2020. For more, see Jason Weingarten and Dan Bartfield, "Virtual Internship Statistics and Trends: A 2020 COVID-19 Impact Report," *Yello* (2020): <https://yello.co/blog/virtual-internship-statistics/>.

#### Best Practices for Adapting Internship Programs in the COVID-19 Era\*

1. *Ensure the credibility and safety of internship programs.* Make sure the internship program is equipped to meet the needs of the students. This means paying attention to issues such as maintaining records of engagement and providing avenues for participants and program directors to evaluate and report on performance.

2. *Go virtual, if possible.* While these are challenging times for companies that employ student interns, as well as for the interns themselves and the schools from which they are selected, the effects of a cancelled internship opportunity can be far-reaching. For this reason, if possible, keep internship opportunities in place rather than canceling. In the education environment, this could also apply to student-teaching experiences. For an example of this, see article by Ryan Teller, "Coronavirus Teaches Student Teachers to Be Adaptable," *Mid-America Outlook* (June 2020): <https://ucollege.edu/20200430/coronavirus-teaches-student-teachers-to-be-adaptable/>.

3. *Communicate with prospective interns.* Regardless of the decision regarding whether to continue or suspend the internship opportunity, maintain timely communication with candidates. Update them on changes such as whether the internship will be cancelled, adjusted to an unpaid experience, and if they will have to work remotely. Regardless of the change, students need a clear and timely explanation so that they can adjust their plans.

4. *Be an advocate.* Many college students are facing anxieties about the future during this uncertain time. For those looking ahead, hoping to get a head start on their career, internships offer a pathway to future jobs and possible job security. Be an advocate for students seeking career support by increasing services to these students, such as continuing to keep them connected with their mentors or connecting them with a new mentor; offering résumé-review services or providing letters of recommendation; or even connecting them with potential employers through the program's alumni network. These services go a long way to supporting students, and it is something they will remember, long-term.

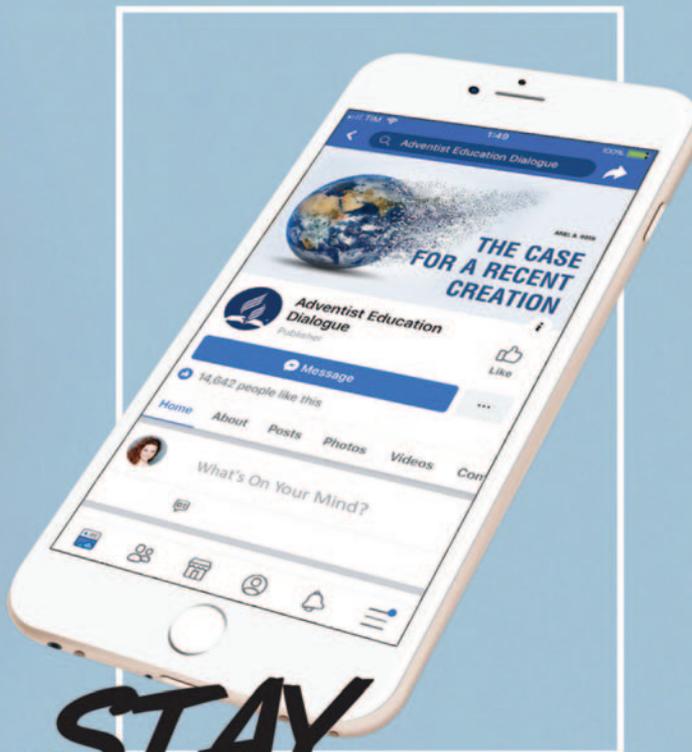
5. *Plan virtual intern events.* Virtual "Meet and Greet" sessions, fun trivia challenges, or career development webinars with the institution's leadership team, potential hiring organizations, or the alumni network of the program can go a long way toward making students feel connected. Virtual events can help interns build relationships with one another and with those facilitating the learning experience.

6. *Provide training and technology resources.* Make sure interns have the resources necessary to connect virtually, as well as training on what is required for the remote learning experience. It may be tempting to assume that given the times in which we live, everyone should know how to connect digitally and has high-speed Internet access. This is not necessarily the case. Adapting to a virtual experience means that every participant should have the tools necessary to be successful.

7. *Ensure that students have what they need to succeed.* Interns will need access to resources on campus, such as library, technology, and student services. They will also need clear guidelines regarding safety online, ethical standards, confidentiality (especially if working with sensitive information), and potential legal liabilities. A helpful resource is Evelyn Villafior-Almocerá, "Authentic Online Assessments (Fieldwork)," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 81:2 (April-June 2019): 18-25. Available at <https://jae.adventist.org/en/2019.81.2.4>.

\* Adapted from Jason Weingarten and Dan Bartfield, "Virtual Internship Statistics and Trends: A 2020 COVID-19 Impact Report," *Yello* (2020): <https://yello.co/blog/virtual-internship-statistics/>.

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