

# Interns as **Intellectual Entrepreneurs**

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**This experiment in intellectual entrepreneurship connects course work to students' goals through internships.**

**A**fter amassing a large number of semester credit hours, university graduates often don't have a clue about how what they've learned will help them to get where they want to go. This problem is especially significant for underrepresented minority and first-generation students, who often want to put their educations to work by making connections between academe and the communities in which they live. Too many undergraduates leave universities not fully appreciating how disciplinary expertise can help to solve real-world problems. We can help undergraduates discover how their own interests can serve as a compass for navigating a complex university and point them toward a meaningful career.

Many students enter college uncertain about what to major in. For these students, career and professional development opportunities come far too late in the game, at the back end of an undergraduate education. To address this potential problem, the Intellectual Entrepreneurship (IE) Consortium at the University of Texas at Austin established a pre-graduate-school



mentorship program that invites students, as early as their sophomore year, to see the relevance of their course choices to given careers. We try to help students see their course work in terms of the direction in which they want to take their lives.

The IE program offers internships that give students the chance to take charge of

their education, discovering how to leverage knowledge for social good—to be “citizen-scholars.” In this article, we share the story of one IE intern, Ana Lucia Hurtado, a co-author of this article. Her experience mirrors that of dozens of others and will, we hope, encourage others to follow our example.

## **Ana Lucia's Story**

When Ana Lucia Hurtado was four years old, her parents left their home country, Peru, because of overwhelming political turmoil. Ana Lucia studied hard in school in the United States. Toward the end of high school, she began exploring engineering and medicine through her magnet school's medical rotation classes and through structured outreach programs at Stanford and Baylor universities and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After enrolling at Duke University, Ana Lucia worried that she would never find her vocation. But she continued with her premed track as was expected; one of her sisters was already a physician, and the other was in medical school.

Ana Lucia probably would have become a physician had she not confronted the greatest challenge of her life: becoming a mother. Facing an unintended pregnancy, she knew she could no longer approach her future passively. The search to find her “calling” resumed in earnest, and she began exploring the possibility of a career in law.

Ana Lucia transferred to the University of Texas and stumbled upon the IE Consortium and its pre-graduate-school internship. Largely self-directed, the internship was unlike any other. Ana Lucia's work at the Children's Rights Clinic at the university's law school encouraged her to think like an intellectual entrepreneur—to study herself, her knowledge, and the career she envisioned.

With a faculty supervisor and graduate student mentor, Ana Lucia got an insider's look at the legal profession. She had a chance to be an ethnographer of law, to study anthropologically, and to reflect on her experiences and the career to which she aspired. The internship proved to be the most valuable educational ex-

perience of Ana Lucia's college tenure. For the first time, she interrogated the academic culture in which she studied, directing her own course of study and collaborating with her supervisors to create the most enriching experience possible.

creasing diversity in graduate education and for enhancing the education of undergraduates. Almost 50 percent of IE pre-grad interns are first-generation or underrepresented minorities, many of whom want to put their education to work in the community. The ability IE offers them to discover otherwise unobserved connections between academe and their personal and professional commitments is therefore especially attractive.

IE, however, is more than a philosophy and set of mechanisms for increasing diversity in graduate education and for institutionalizing academic engagement and public scholarship. In fact, IE owes its success with first-generation and underrepresented minorities to its intellec-

conferences with their mentors. Going well beyond the "applied" or "just do it" mentality of typical work internships, IE interns become anthropologists of a discipline; they reflect upon, question, and share what they are learning about themselves, the academic culture, and the value of disciplinary knowledge with interns from other fields. What better way to learn about an academic discipline than through such entrepreneurial discovery?

IE shifts the metaphor and model of education from "apprenticeship-certification-entitlement" to "discovery-ownership-accountability." As a result, IE may be a promising intellectual platform for simultaneously addressing issues that often are not—yet should be—seen as inherently interconnected: diversity, service learning, civic engagement, accountability, inter- and cross-disciplinary study, and the increasing necessity of documenting concretely and persuasively the value of higher education for external constituencies.

As the country discusses the recent recommendations of the Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, we must refrain from becoming ensnared in a debate about the metrics of assessment. Instead, university leaders must think and live outside the box, recognizing the sometimes stifling nature of undergraduate education.

If we manage to do so, all students will benefit enormously. As we are learning from the IE experiment, there will also be profound positive consequences for first-generation and underrepresented minority students, thus enhancing our quest to increase diversity in higher education. And who knows? If students become intellectual entrepreneurs, perhaps the goals of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education will be more easily realized. ☞

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ually rigorous approach to learning and scholarship. IE, we believe, may be a pedagogy that potentially will produce exciting and sorely needed reforms in higher education—including changes to the undergraduate curriculum.

From the Ground Up

### From the Ground Up

IE's principal achievement is enabling students to understand academic disciplines from the ground up, contemplating how they might use their personal and professional aspirations within a discipline. Interns shadow their graduate student mentors in research labs, graduate courses, and the undergraduate classes taught by their mentors; they also "experience" a discipline by interviewing faculty members, attending departmental colloquia and events, and traveling to academic

This experiment in intellectual entrepreneurship dispelled many myths Ana Lucia held about the legal profession, showing her that being a good lawyer and a good mother were not mutually exclusive. By bringing together in one class her personal, academic, and professional interests, the internship helped Ana Lucia discover and own her education; she learned the real meaning of a discipline and how academic expertise can be used to transform lives—her own and others.

This kind of intellectual entrepreneurship shows great promise for in-