

Intern program offers college students opportunities to get work experience in Europe

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By **Charles M. Belluomo, U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs**



Anthony Chimente processes records in the awards section of the U.S. Army Europe personnel directorate, Aug. 9. Chimente is one of 34 college students working across the Army in Europe this summer under the auspices of the Workforce Recruitment Program, a partnership between the Department of Labor and Department of Defense that coordinates summer internships for college students with disabilities. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Joel Salgado)

HEIDELBERG, Germany -- Most full-time college students spend their summer breaks either vacationing or working. This year 34 college students did both by participating in the Workforce Recruitment Program with the U.S. Army in Europe.

The program is a partnership between the Department of Labor and Department of Defense that coordinates summer internships for college students with disabilities, explained Rafael Reyes, the U.S. Army Europe Equal Opportunity manager.

Universities in the U.S. host annual on-campus recruitment visits. Program recruiters interview, rate and categorize student applicants, who are then entered into a national database. Federal and non-federal employers can search database candidates for temporary and full-time employment, said Reyes.

But the WRP isn't just an employment program.

"WRP doesn't hire. We simply coordinate the effort," Reyes said.

Jobs depend on military and civilian managers who can mentor and develop the students.

The goal is to match students with positions relevant to their areas of study or professional interests, but this is not always possible, Reyes explained. The program's aim is to provide a form of developmental internship for participants.

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Employment is not always available in their chosen area of study, but students can still accept jobs in other fields, he added.

Students are eligible for the program from the time they enter college until one year after graduation. Graduating participants said that extra period of eligibility is especially beneficial and encouraging for those preparing to enter an increasingly competitive job market.

The opportunity to complete an internship is also beneficial. A May 2011 Rutgers University study showed that nearly two-thirds of all recent college graduates "believe they will need more formal education if they are to be successful in their chosen career," and that students who completed internships while in school earned roughly 20 percent more than those who did not.

Karen Anderson, a former WRP intern, said the program helps employers as well.

"The program is also a great resource for private companies and federal agencies tasked with special projects but who don't have the manpower to complete them or the budget to hire additional employees," she said.

Reyes said hiring departments incur no additional costs for employing WRP candidates, since the Department of Labor pays their salaries. No cost to the employing agency is one more reason the Department of Defense, IBM and Prudential Insurance like supporting the program, he added.

Reyes also said the program here is growing each year. This summer he helped 34 students from 16 states and Puerto Rico get jobs in Germany, up from 19 hires in 2010. In fact, the Army in Europe employed 31 percent of all Army hires under the WRP for this year, while the majority of the remaining students hired by federal agencies were placed in locations such as Washington, D.C., Japan and South Korea.

The number of students hired by the Army in Europe shows its support of President Obama's executive order to increase federal employment of people with disabilities. The Department of Labor calls the program "a model strategy" for complying with the order.

Wesley Tipton, a 22-year-old graphic design student at the University Tennessee at Knoxville talked about his WRP experience in Germany.

"This has been a great opportunity. I've gotten paid to travel and live in Europe while gaining valuable work experience," he said.

Tipton said living in a foreign country and working for the DoD has given him insight into the government and U.S. tax dollars at work.

"Working for the Army has also been a great experience that I never would have gotten if not for the program," Tipton said. "When I first got here, I was expecting it to be all, "Yes sir, No Sir," because I was working for the Army. I then realized the Army is made up of much more than just Soldiers and that there are thousands of civilians that make up this fantastic workforce."

Jeff Greer is a high school teacher and doctoral candidate finishing his master's degree at Texas Tech University. At age 60, Greer is older than the average WRP participant, but his full time student status keeps him eligible for the program.

Greer said participating in the program has been a good experience, and that Reyes has "just done an incredible job. He goes out of his way to help in any way he can. He is like a family member taking care of details. He goes above and beyond anything he would have to do."

More information on the WRP is available at the program's [website](#).