



CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

PREP AND PAROCHIAL EDUCATION

Students get a taste of real-world experience

By [LEE CHILCOTE](#)

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At Gilmour Academy, students interested in science have the opportunity to work with biomedical researchers from the Cleveland Clinic. At University School, students spend summers shadowing Northeast Ohio entrepreneurs. And at Saint Martin de Porres, an urban high school, students spend one day per week working at a major corporation.

These are just a few examples of ways that private and parochial schools in Northeast Ohio offer opportunities for high school students to gain professional experiences before they graduate. Such programs are becoming increasingly common as schools seek to impart real-world skills to students, help them develop a competitive advantage when they're applying to colleges and push them to gain experiences that could land a job.

"We're very interested in hands-on, authentic learning and engaging students when work has a purpose beyond the grade," says Deanne Nowak, dean of institutional and curriculum research at Gilmour Academy. "We want them to learn because of what they're learning, and not simply because of what they'll get as a reward."

Students and families also are seeking out these programs at local private schools. "I'll hear later, after they've done Catalyst, that's why they came to Gilmour," adds Nowak of the program, a research internship in which students are paired with mentors at Cleveland institutions.

Some of these programs are required, but many are electives. They focus on helping students gain business skills, learn about entrepreneurship or understand the civic or nonprofit sector. They're all different, but have one thing in common: they're growing.

When Nowak was first hired 15 years ago, seniors were required to do a senior project, but there were few other professional programs. Today, the school offers three other programs modeled after Catalyst, focused on community service, leadership and entrepreneurship. About 10% to 25% of each graduating class participates. Through the Catalyst program, students do actual lab experiments — one student spent the semester cutting and sanding bone while studying fragility among the elderly at Case Western Reserve University. They analyze results, write journal entries and give formal presentations.

At University School, 10 students spend five weeks each summer working at a local business through the school's Morgan Apprenticeship program, which pairs students with entrepreneur mentors. Students have the chance to attend business trips, sit in on meetings and work on actual projects.

"Entrepreneurship teaches very important life skills," says Greg Malkin, director of the Entrepreneurship Institute at University School. "Even if students don't become entrepreneurs, they learn to take responsibility for their actions, to take control of their lives. It teaches the idea of grit and perseverance, bouncing back from failure." Some University School students actually do become entrepreneurs. Through a partnership with the North Union Farmers Market at Shaker Square, students have developed product ideas such as homemade granola or T-shirts and sold them at an outdoor stand all summer.

Elite private schools aren't the only ones to offer professional programs. At Saint Martin de Porres, a parochial school that is part of the national Cristo Rey network and whose mission is to serve families earning about \$26,000 a year, students work at companies like Parker Hannifin, gaining work experience that ultimately helps them get into college.

"Students are not treated like interns, they're treated like a valuable part of their teams," says Caitlin McDermott, director of the annual fund and special events with de Porres.

At de Porres, the program not only benefits the students, it's also a mechanism to help fund the school.

Companies pay \$28,000 a year for a full-time staff person (students rotate through sites). Students work to pay for school, but also learn through work.

Employers say these kinds of programs not only help students gain experience, but also provide employers with something valuable. For example, the Orlando Baking Company had a University School intern analyze marketing efforts to reach younger consumers.

"Today, it's so competitive for young people," says Nick Orlando, vice president of sales and marketing with Orlando Baking Company. "A program like this helps prepare them and gives them an edge. You see higher maturity levels when they come out."

College admissions officers say professional work experiences can help applicants to stand out. "We're always looking for unique, compelling factors that a student can bring to a community," says Robert McCullough, director of undergraduate admissions at Case Western Reserve University. "For some, it might be that they had a terrific professional experience. It may be the thing that propels them to success."

Cedric Hansen

Gilmour Academy

Incoming senior

Field of interest: Engineering

Hosting employer: Dr. Ozan Akkus, biomedical engineering department, Case Western Reserve University

Most interesting takeaway from experience: "I got to learn how lab work is done in a real-life lab. I got to learn a lot about the field of engineering, which is a field of interest for me."



Hansen

Matthew Kaufman

University School

Will attend Babson College, Wellesley, Mass., in the fall

Field of interest: Business

Hosting employer: Orlando Baking Company

Most interesting takeaway from the experience: "The biggest advantage was getting experience in a professional work environment, not just a school where everyone is your own age."



Kaufman

John Frank Largent

Saint Martin de Porres High School

Will attend Kent State University in the fall

Field of interest: Pharmacy/Biology

Hosting employers: ShurTech Brands, Lubrizol Corp.

Most interesting takeaway from the experience: "I've learned a lot about becoming more communicative and able to work with different kinds of people. They really treat me like I'm an individual and I actually matter."



Largent

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