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WAYNE STATE
UNIVERSITY



CECE

INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AWARDS PROGRAM

2024
CASE
STUDY

IEP CATEGORY - INNOVATION

Wayne State University

TechTown internships help Wayne State students develop career skills

TECHTOWN INTERNSHIPS LAUNCHED IN 2021

TechTown — Wayne State University’s entrepreneurship hub — introduced an internship program for Wayne State students in 2021. Students intern with one of several departments — from program teams like Small Business Services to administrative departments like Marketing and Fund Development. Interns work 20 hours per week over the course of a semester (15 weeks). Twenty-four students have participated in the program to date and two have been hired into full-time positions.

TechTown works closely with university departments to ensure that students are paired with the opportunities that will most benefit them and their work. The internships are paid positions, and interns receive firsthand experience, coaching, and mentoring, plus time to connect with team members across TechTown and its partners. Interns can also attend and volunteer at events, like TechTown’s annual Toast of the Town fundraiser or the Comerica Hatch Detroit Contest (where one hard-working entrepreneur wins \$100,000 to open a brick-and-mortar business). There, students can network with sponsors and funders, ecosystem partners, and the community.

The internships are one of the ways TechTown is supporting the university’s efforts to ensure its students graduate career-ready and prepared to thrive, a goal reflected in both our 2022-2027 strategic plan and complementary economic impact strategy, as well as our new College to Career initiative.

Introduced by Wayne State President Dr. Kimberly Andrews Espy in November 2023, College to Career broadens the university’s approach to student success and enhances its impact on the broader community. One of the ways it does that is by offering “learning by doing” experiences, which include internships, micro-externships, and co-ops. TechTown interns explore career interests while earning their degrees and applying their studies to real-world environments.



TechTown Growth Capital intern, Austin Churley, with Wayne State University President, Dr. Kimberly Andrews Espy, and Ned Staebler, Vice President for Economic Development at Wayne State, and the President and CEO of TechTown Detroit at TechTown’s Annual Fundraiser, 2023



FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE REAL WORLD

After announcing the College to Career initiative, President Espy called six students and recent alumni to the stage for a panel conversation about how their college experiences facilitated their early successes. One of those panelists was TechTown intern Gabrielle Rush.

Rush is obtaining a bachelor's in urban studies and public affairs at Wayne State. She is the vice president of the Wayne State Economics Club, outreach director for M1 Digital Consulting (a student-managed digital consulting agency), and a member of the Mike Ilitch School of Business' Student Leadership Council. She interned for TechTown's Entrepreneurial Education team during the fall 2023 semester and extended her internship to the winter 2024 semester.

As an Entrepreneurial Education intern, Rush has worked on two main projects: mapping out TechTown alumni businesses and entrepreneurs using ArcGIS — an online geographic information system software that allows users to connect people, locations, and data using interactive maps — and gathering feedback and data from TechTown alumni about their experiences with the Ask an Expert program. Rush says that prior to her internship at TechTown, she had “no experience working with large datasets or conducting geospatial analysis.” By using ArcGIS, she analyzes data to map out alumni addresses, identify data trends, and compile comprehensive reports, and has a newfound passion for this particular work.

“This exposure has facilitated numerous opportunities for skill development and exploration,” Rush says of her internship. “Notably, I've been able to practice public speaking and learned how to use new software applications such as ArcGIS, which are crucial skills within my field of urban planning. I have also learned how entrepreneurship plays a vital role in economic development, in the larger scheme of planning. Witnessing firsthand how entrepreneurial initiatives contribute to urban development has broadened my understanding and enriched my perspective on the dynamics of community development.”

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE AND GROWING YOUR NETWORK

Austin Churley interned for TechTown's Growth Capital program, offered through the Tech-Based Programs team. He is obtaining his bachelor's in finance and a minor in entrepreneurship and innovation through the Wayne State Mike Ilitch School of Business. Churley participates in Wayne State's Corporate Mentorship Program, the Mike Ilitch School of Business' Student Leadership



Council, and the Financial Management Association. He is also the co-founder of Warrior Ventures, a student-run venture fund that aims to bridge the gap between Michigan’s investment ecosystem and Wayne State students. Earlier this year, Churley was named a 2024 Mike Ilitch School of Business 25 Under 25 Award recipient.

As a Growth Capital intern during the fall 2023 and winter 2024 semesters, Churley provided his insight and assisted tech founders throughout their entrepreneurial journey. He researched resources that met different founders’ needs and provided support for Venture 313, an initiative founded in part by TechTown to provide capital, coaching, and resources for tech entrepreneurs to launch their ventures. One of the most notable projects Churley says he worked on as an intern was building out “Playbook” content for Venture 313, which helps founders access resources across Detroit to build and scale their businesses. Churley also assisted the team with planning TechTown events for the 2024 NFL Draft, which took place in Detroit in late April.

“Interning at TechTown has been an amazing opportunity for not only my education, but my overall network has grown exponentially,” Churley says. “As someone who is pursuing a career in venture capital, as well as founding Wayne State’s first-ever student-run venture fund, being a part of this team has exposed me to numerous opportunities to learn firsthand what the Detroit startup ecosystem truly looks like, as well as gain a growing passion for building up the city of Detroit economically to empower aspiring entrepreneurs.”



LINKS TO FURTHER INFORMATION

Supporting Information:

- [TechTown Detroit](#)
- [Wayne State University 2022-2027 Strategic Plan](#)
- [Wayne State University College to Career Initiative](#)
- [TechTown Toast of the Town Fundraiser](#)
- [Comerica Hatch Detroit Contest](#)
- [TechTown's Growth Capital Program](#)



ABOUT APLU

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is North America's oldest higher education association. APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The association's membership consists of public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations.

APLU's mission is to expand access and improve student success to deliver the innovative workforce of tomorrow; advance and promote research and discovery to improve society, foster economic growth, and address global challenges; and build healthy, prosperous, equitable, and vibrant communities locally and globally.

Based in Washington, DC, the association's work is furthered by an active and effective advocacy arm that works with Congress and the administration as well as the media to advance federal policies that strengthen public universities and benefit the students they serve.

ABOUT THE IEP PROGRAM

APLU and its [Commission on Economic and Community Engagement \(CECE\)](#) established the Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Program to help higher education institutions codify, elevate, and advance their campus enterprise supporting economic and community development.

The **IEP Program** recognizes institutions that have demonstrated a meaningful, ongoing and substantial commitment to economic and community development, growth, and economic opportunity.

The **IEP Awards Program** recognize exemplary and innovative projects in university-based economic and community engagement:

- Talent and workforce development
- Innovation, entrepreneurship, and tech-based economic development
- Place development through public service, outreach, and community engagement

Learn more at: www.APLU.org/IEP

