

EoC Interns

A new internship program at Economy of Communion businesses provides a hands-on education in solidarity and brotherhood in the workplace.

By John Mundell

“The Economy of Communion gives us young people the hope that a united and more just world is possible,” said Fernanda Garcia, an environmental engineering student from São Paulo, Brazil, after participating in a six-month internship in 2006 with our EoC environmental consulting company, Mundell & Associates.

The internship, part of a pilot program first begun in 2004 between the U.S. and Brazilian EoC businesses, is one of eleven that have been completed by youth of the Focolare who are studying in universities in Brazil, the U.S., Spain and Venezuela. These on-the-job opportunities, which try to match the student’s career interests with the service or production area of a company, are offered within the EoC network, where the human person is viewed as the key ingredient to successful operations and a “culture of giving” is a closely held corporate value. The first of its kind among EoC companies around the world, the internship program aims at providing young people with a hands-on educational laboratory for learning the fundamental ideals of solidarity and brotherhood within the workplace.

Since its inception, EoC companies in Brazil, the U.S. and Spain have participated by offering to pick up travel and living expenses during the internships. Some interns have also received stipends when work arrangements allow for it. The program has included students majoring in engineering (chemical, environmental, industrial), political science, economics, international studies, law, geophysics and education, offering technical training in the intern’s area of interest as well as a working formation in the Focolare’s spirituality of unity.

In developing a website that has become an important marketing and sales tool for one EoC business, Indianapolis intern Kyle Fillenworth expanded his skills as a graphic design and animation major. “Working in an EoC business was exciting because everyday I would get up and remind myself that loving was the most important task I had to do for that day,” he said. “I could say that the experience was both divine and practical, but in hindsight, it was really all divine because God was present in the mutual love practiced there.”

EoC companies foster collaboration and openness. Supervisors meet regularly with interns to share their personal efforts in managing an EoC business and putting into practice the ideals and goals of the EoC. Julie Johnstone, who was majoring in pharmaceutical sciences and who developed technical databases during her internship, was struck by the sense of camaraderie among her co-workers. “I felt part of something bigger than all of us,” she said, “regardless of who had been at the company longer, who had more experience or was even older in age.”

While the technical training each intern received was relevant to their special interests, it was the EoC workplace environment that had the most profound effect on their future outlook. Cristina Colella, a Brazilian chemical engineer, received her health and safety training certification and analyzed environmental data during her internship. She commented, “The atmosphere in the office and in the field was full of love. It has overflowed into my daily life, and I am sure it has made me a better person.”

The program will expand this year, with the participation of several more EoC companies around the world.

—With Brenda Balli

For more information on how to be a part in the Economy of Communion Internship Program—as an intern or as a business—contact your local Focolare center.

Word to the Interns

“Everyone involved in the EoC shares the same desire to transform the business place through relationships based on reciprocal love. Being in such an environment on a day-to-day basis enabled me to understand the crucial and powerful role relationships play in the workplace and to see how the wider vision of the company served as the underlying motivation for many of its activities within its field of work and within the community.”

—Elizabeth Garlow, political science and economics, Farmington Hills, MI

“An EoC business aims not only at a sharing of the business’ profits, but also at building relationships with people in and out of the company, treating each one as you would like to be treated, creating a helping atmosphere in the company and, why not, an atmosphere of family. It was truly an environment in which I was able to grow professionally and also as a person who wants to build a united world.”

—Fernanda Garcia, environmental engineer, São Paulo, Brazil

“I saw that when you treat employees equally, listen and respect their opinion, worry about their families, pay a fair salary and respect their limits, they start to care about each other, care about the company and look for better solutions to help the company improve.”

—Leticia Teixeira, lawyer, São Paulo, Brazil

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—Kyle Fillenworth, graphic design Indianapolis, IN