

# Microsoft interns get perks, pay, play

August 28 2009, By Sharon Pian Chan

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The same day Microsoft reported some of its worst financial results, a dozen buses left the Redmond campus. During rush hour, they headed toward Highway 520 as a phalanx of cops on motorcycles shut down the onramps ahead, clearing the path to the Pacific Science Center.

[Microsoft](#) had rented the museum for a private party and a screening of the new "Harry Potter" movie. After the screening, about 600 attendees received a free [Xbox 360](#) video-game console.

The recipients of this VIP treatment? Microsoft's summer interns.

"You feel like royalty to be escorted by police," said Joriz De Guzman, a 19-year-old intern working toward his master's degree in business administration at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

In a year when Microsoft cut nearly 5,000 jobs, the company continues to lavish money on its internship program, bringing about 1,000 college and graduate students from across the country to the Redmond campus for the summer.

The goal, the company says, is to recruit future employees and to turn the interns into walking billboards for Microsoft back at school, chanting "Microsoft gave me an Xbox" or "I went to a barbecue at Bill Gates' house."

"We want to cultivate a pipeline of really, really strong employment candidates," said Kerry Olin, general manager for university recruiting.

"Objective No. 2 is to create the kind of experience and window into Microsoft that sends them back -- whether they get offers or not -- as people who can be advocates for Microsoft."

The Gates barbecue, a tradition for many years, is gone now that he no longer works full time at Microsoft. CEO [Steve Ballmer](#) instead does a Q&A session with the interns, and pizza with the MBA interns.

Olin said the company added the Pacific Science Center trip to replace the Gates house party.

Last year, the U.N.-like motorcade ended at Woodland Park Zoo, where Ben Folds and Vampire Weekend gave a private concert. Free Zunes for everybody capped off the event.

The summer of intern fun is not unusual at tech companies, which compete to hire top college graduates. Google, which brings in hundreds of interns each year, puts interns into "cohorts," small groups that bond over weekly rock climbing and paintballing outings. All the Google interns in Mountain View, Calif., went on a boat cruise.

Besides meeting with Ballmer, Microsoft interns attend presentations by division presidents. And Steven Sinofsky, president of the Windows division, hosted a model-rocket launch at a park with the Windows group interns to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the first moon landing.

The benefits are one draw, interns said, as is the chance to do real work.

"It's not your average make-coffee-and-copies-for-us internship," said Ederlyn Lacson, a linguistics major from the University of Maryland at College Park. "People are working on products that have (shipped) or will ship."

Lacson, at Safeco Field for an intern trip to a Seattle Mariners game, is working in the natural-language group on Microsoft's spellchecker. She said she is weighing the possibility of coming back or working for the CIA or the National Security Agency.

De Guzman is working on compiling best practices for digital marketing for Microsoft's Project software.

"One thing that really drew me was the (chance to have a) product-manager role, to become the [CEO](#) of this thing and drive all the decisions," he said.

Interns get mentors and performance reviews. Microsoft offers full-time jobs to 85 percent of the interns, and more than 80 percent accept.

Olin said the company had about 20 percent fewer interns this summer than in previous years, reflecting the reduction in Microsoft's overall work force.

Microsoft declined to give exact salary numbers; Olin said interns make about 80 percent of a starting full-time employee. That comes to about \$4,600 to \$6,000 a month, based on pay of entry-level software engineers.

They also receive a housing stipend and relocation costs for the summer.

Plus, there's the baseball game, weekend outings to sky-dive and paraglide, and to balance everything out, a "Day of Caring" where the interns volunteer on projects with organizations such as Northwest Harvest and Earthcorp.

"The investment the company makes in a program like this is staggering," Olin said.

As for the Pacific Science Center shindig, he said, "It's actually a fairly low-budget effort because of our relationships with the studios and that kind of thing." He said the police escort "is a nice story for the students. The truth of the matter is we just try to cooperate with the police when we're trying to move a dozen buses across town at rush hour."

(A State Patrol spokesman said police escorts are contracted privately and paid for by the person or company that hires them.)

The free Xboxes are an investment, too, Olin said. "We also get some of our technology on campuses in the hands of thought leaders.

"There was a Head & Shoulders commercial that ran in the 1980s, and commercial's tag was, 'You never get a (second) chance to make a first impression.' That's a pretty good truism for our internship program."

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## JUST A FEW OF THE PERKS

- XBox console
- Housing stipend
- Competitive salary, estimated at \$4,600 to \$6,000 a month
- Relocation costs
- Mentors
- Sky diving
- Paragliding

- Private party at Pacific Science Center and screening of new "Harry Potter" movie
- "Intern Day of Caring," a day of volunteering
- Puzzle day, 8 hours of 1,000 Microsoft employees working on logic puzzles
- Mount Rainier hike
- Dinner at Farestart
- Seattle Mariners game

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