

International Internships



Early morning on the King's course at Gleneagles in Scotland

ATM Editor Brett Robinson examines the value of internships and their role in furthering the careers of up and coming turf managers.

It was Dene Goldsack, winner of the 2003 AGCSA Distinguished Service Award, who perhaps summed it up best.

Upon accepting his award at this year's 19th Australian Turfgrass Conference in Adelaide, the South Australian icon commented how he was blown away by the professionalism and commitment that AGCSA Graduate of the Year winner James Dalton had exhibited.

During his award presentation, Dalton outlined his definite career objectives, including how he was in discussion with the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews to work there in 2005.

As Goldsack observed, the superintendent profession has evolved greatly over the past 30 years. Nowadays, an arsenal of products are available to assist turf managers prepare world-class surfaces, while conferences, publications and the Internet have helped expand the superintendent knowledge pool.

The range of options available for up and coming turf managers has also grown, and

completing a turf management diploma is now commonplace.

However, in the modern competitive job market more and more are looking to get that certain edge which will enhance their career prospects, so it is not surprising the overseas internship is becoming an increasingly popular option.

Stars and Stripes

Perhaps the most well known avenue is the Ohio State University Agricultural and Horticultural Internship program.

Established in 1979 by Mike Chrisman, it covers all facets of the agriculture and horticulture industries, with 5000 interns from 34 countries having gone through the program since its inception.

The program offers internships for single greenkeepers between the ages of 19 and 27, which entail upwards of 18 months work experience and the option of three months study at the university.

Currently, between 20 and 30 Australians are working on US courses with over 120 international interns going through each year.

Interns are placed on the world's best courses. For example, Adam Mortimer from the Brisbane Golf Club is currently at Pine Valley in New Jersey, consistently rated the No.1 course in the world by Golf Magazine and Golf Digest.

Most of the courses involved in the program are east of the Mississippi, with students experiencing some of the best cool season grass courses in the north before moving south for the winter.

Most of the international interns hail from the UK, but Australians have been involved since day one and, not surprisingly, have developed a reputation as being among the hardest workers.

The Ohio program isn't heavily advertised and is more word of mouth around the industry. This, according to the program directors, is more in an attempt to ensure that only those with the desire and commitment to further their career apply.

Australian coordinator for the Ohio program is Thirteenth Beach assistant superintendent David Goldie, himself a former Ohio intern at the Harbour Town course, South Carolina.

Goldie believes the Ohio program and internships in general are without doubt the best way to get a foothold within the industry.

"It's really just the whole experience of working in a different environment and getting an insight into the way they run things there," says Goldie.

"One of the big advantages of the program is that interns get to work with different turfgrasses. You can move from an inland all-bentgrass or all-Kentucky bluegrass course down to an all-bermudagrass coastal course. They also get to experience the over-sowing process, which is something we're not exposed to in Australia.

"In most cases they are working on courses with huge budgets (up to \$US2 million) and staff numbers of 20 or more. Most will experience the pressure of preparing for a major tournament, as well as working with the latest machinery and turfgrass technology."

Communication is an increasingly important facet of the modern superintendent's job and Goldie says that working with different cultures, particularly the large Mexican and African American workforces employed at US courses, equipped him with more effective communication skills.

"On top of that, it's great for the CV," adds Goldie. "Not so much that you've gained these



Interns broom sand after coring the 9th green at the Oakmont Country Club in Pennsylvania

new skills, but the fact that you have been prepared to go overseas and leave your comfort zone to further your career. It shows you're committed to your career and a lot about your aspirations."

Despite all the information available through tertiary courses and over the Internet, Goldie believes internship programs will continue to

play an important part in the future development of those coming into the industry.

"We Australians pride ourselves on our practical experience and that is why the American superintendents will prefer an Australian intern rather than someone straight out of a US college," Goldie says.

"Because Aussies have that hands-on experience, they can be sent out to work, whereas they're used to taking on guys who have taken stuff off the Internet or out of textbooks.

"They may know the agronomy of the turf better, but they need their hands held for 12 months which is not what they want in the short term.

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Australian intern Angus Mahoney collects cores at Oakmont



Interns hard at work on the 6th green during the renovation season at Oakmont

"At the end of the day, greenkeeping is one of those trades where a guy will gain more respect if he has gone out there and experienced it hands-on."

The Highland Fling

While Ohio ranks as one of the better-known internship schemes, a number of international golf courses run private internship programs. Every year since 1992, Gleneagles has offered student placements on the Gleneagles

Excellence in Golf Award Scheme (GEGAS).

Initially set up to take mainly UK-based turf graduates, the scheme has broadened to include European students, and, more recently, Australians and other internationals.

Currently calling Gleneagles home are two 24-year-old Aussies, Dave Cassidy and Pete Foreman.

Cassidy, already a qualified greenkeeper from Sydney's Mona Vale Golf Club, travelled to the UK to broaden his work and life



Gleneagles intern Dave Cassidy mows the 1st green of the PGA Centenary course during the Diageo Championship in June

experiences, and after contacting Gleneagles superintendent Scott Fenwick was awarded a place on the program.

Foreman, who served a four-year apprenticeship at Adelaide's Belair Park Golf Club, ended up at Gleneagles after a 10-month placement at the Westchester Country Club in Rye, New York, through the Ohio program.

The Gleneagles complex boasts three championship courses – The King's course, The Queen's course and PGA Centenary course – and sits on an 850 acre site one hour north of Glasgow, Scotland.

There are two maintenance facilities, with the main central compound caring for the King's and Queen's courses, as well as the short par three 'Wee' course. The PGA compound looks after the Centenary course, venue for the European PGA's Diageo Championship and the 2014 Ryder Cup. Interns swap between compounds during their stay.

Cassidy was initially placed at the PGA compound with three other students from Austria, Germany and England. For four months Cassidy slotted into the day-to-day running of the PGA Centenary course under the guidance of head greenkeeper Pete Pattenden who manages 16 full-time employees and six seasonals from March to September.

During his time, Cassidy was involved in preparations for the Diageo Championship, his first major tournament experience.

Foreman was placed in the other compound alongside students from France, the Netherlands, and Spain. This facility has 24 full-time staff, six seasonals and three full-time mechanics. Alan Patterson runs the compound and is assisted by deputies Hugh Stewart and Mike Doris.

As the peak golfing season nears an end, interns begin the theory component of their year, with each completing an individual assignment. The assignments are then presented to the golf courses and estates director and program sponsors in late January.

The theory sessions include visits to many famous golf clubs and other top sporting venues and stadiums throughout the UK.

Cassidy and Foreman continue a strong tradition of Australian involvement in the program and after completing the program hope to emulate their fellow countrymen who have secured senior positions on courses overseas.

Once such ex-GEGAS student is Steve Johnson who after spending a stint as superintendent at the Riffa Golf Club in Bahrain, moved on to his current position as superintendent of the Nanea Golf Club in Hawaii, the first all-seashore paspalum course on the American island.

From India to Egypt

The opportunities that internships can open up are vast. For Melbourne's Sean Griffin, an internship sparked what ended up being a 10-year stint working at some of the world's more exotic golfing destinations.

In 1991, Griffin was accepted on the Ohio program and placed at the Coral Ridge Country Club, a 36-hole facility which doubled as the head office of the Robert Trent Jones design and construction company.

For a period of two years Griffin was involved in all aspects of turf management

from the construction of an 18-hole championship course through to the preparation of an LPGA Tour event.

Griffin was hooked on the experience and after a brief respite in Australia, headed to India where he took up a position as construction superintendent at the Royal Palms Golf Course, designed by Melbourne's Pacific Coast Design.

"When arriving in India, I thought 'What the hell am I doing here?'" recalls Griffin. "It smelled and the poverty was shocking."

The project was situated in Bombay near the famous Bollywood Film Studios. A cast of thousands made up the construction team with the greens and all feature work done manually.

The experience gave Griffin his first taste of construction methods under third world conditions. It also introduced him to some of the unique hurdles encountered in such places.

"One evening I received a phone call telling me that an elephant had wandered across the 15th green which had just been planted!"

After finishing at Royal Palms and a further year at the Arabian Sea Country Club in Pakistan, Griffin took up the superintendent's

position at the Emirates Golf Club in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

"The two worlds of Pakistan and the UAE could not have been further apart," Griffin recalls.

"The city of Dubai was spotlessly clean and the infrastructure first class. Having been in construction, the chance to concentrate purely on maintenance was a pleasant change.

"The course was managed by mostly British expatriates with unlimited funds to keep the course in excellent condition year round. I had a staff of 55!"

In 1998, Griffin got the chance to prepare for the course for the Dubai Desert Classic, a tournament in which Aussie Steve Allan finished second to Jose Maria Olazabal.

From Dubai, Griffin moved down the coast of the Persian Gulf to the Abu Dhabi Golf Club. At that time the course had been under construction for six years and had been ready for play for three.

Griffin's role was to set up a team to see the course open within six months of his arrival. This included arranging personnel, budgets, machinery and all maintenance programs for the 36-hole facility.

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After four years in the UAE, Griffin accepted the superintendent's position at the Gary Player-designed Cascades Golf Club five hours south of Cairo, Egypt, in 2001.

The 18-hole facility lay on the shores of the Red Sea and during his time Griffin oversaw the construction of a par-three academy course.

"The differences in staffing levels would amaze most Aussie superintendents," says Griffin on his experiences working in Asia and the Middle East.

"We had a large number of greenkeepers, but you have to take into consideration many different factors such as education, machinery availability, growth rate of the turf and climatic conditions.

"My main concern at Cascades was water consumption and availability, which influenced my decision to plant the academy course with seashore paspalum. We also fitted a pump station which gave us the ability to irrigate the turf with a salt water/desalinated water mixture, which cut our irrigation costs considerably."

If Griffin had his time again he says he wouldn't change a thing.

"Having worked as an expat superintendent over the last decade, I have found it to be

challenging, educational and a great life experience," he says.

"The advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. The challenges you encounter are what make the experience unique – the different climatic aspects, different turfgrass varieties, communication difficulties.

"Perhaps the biggest thing I gained from it was to respect different cultures and people's beliefs."

As far as Griffin's initial internship experience, for a young man aged 23 he believes it was a great foundation and stepping stone.

"The amount you learn is far greater than you will ever do in Australia, mainly because they do things on a large scale and with big budgets," Griffin says.

"The internship gave me a great deal of knowledge about what you can achieve in the industry overseas.

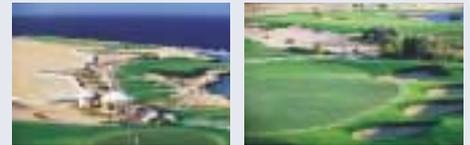
"In my opinion, you cannot get a better education, see the world and make some great friends along the way.

"I would recommend it to any turf manager. If it's not for you, Australia will always be here waiting when you return."

In the next edition of Australian Turfgrass Management magazine, Adam Mortimer from the Brisbane Golf Club, currently on the Ohio program, will give us an exclusive look behind the gates at the world's number one ranked golf course Pine Valley. One not to miss! 🏌️



The Par 5, 9th on the PGA Centenary course, Gleneagles



The 5th and 9th holes at the Cascades Golf Club in Egypt