

Interns and apprentices get experience, give ideas to help build transit at GoTriangle

Not all internships are created equally, with some involving more messenger deliveries and coffee runs than worthwhile work experience. Some don't even pay. At GoTriangle, however, interns and apprentices say they gain valuable work experience and get to contribute to real projects. And they even get a paycheck.

GoTriangle funds our internship program, while an N.C. Department of Transportation grant supports the [Public Transportation Internship/Apprenticeship Program](#). Both pathways allow fresh ideas, energy and knowledge to flow into many GoTriangle departments, leading to improvements on several transit fronts. Those interested in internships can find opportunities by checking gotriangle.org/careers. The hiring manager for each GoTriangle department requesting interns, in coordination with Human Resources, interviews candidates and makes the final decision about who gets the internship. NCDOT accepts applications through March 1 for the 12-month apprenticeship program, which starts in June each year.



GoTriangle Data Technician Chris Clark says getting into the apprenticeship program in 2006 not only helped him land a professional job but also in time helped GoTriangle streamline its data reporting to the National Transit Database. Clark was a graduate student working on his master's in regional planning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill when he began his apprenticeship in Operations at GoTriangle, then called Triangle Transit. *Chris Clark pictured at left*

"So I actually was in my second year in graduate school and saw this opportunity to get some experience, hands-on, working in the field," Clark recalls. "At that time, [Triangle Transit] was starting to grow, and they were starting to recognize the need for someone to be able to collect data and to be able to manage it. So by having someone who was dedicated to it – who would be able to keep

records and have them in a place where we could pull [data] – that was what led to them realizing that there was a need for this position."

Clark says the apprenticeship experience helped him get hired as a planner with the City of Norfolk in 2007. Two years later, he returned to work part-time at GoTriangle, starting off by conducting passenger counts. In 2011, GoTriangle made his position a full-time data technician job dedicated to reporting information to the National Transit Database and the state government.

"Now, I've been in a position where I'm talking to almost everyone in the company, and they get my feedback," Clark says. "I understand what kind of reports are needed and what we need to report on, then they get that information from me. I help them get data, and I help them make decisions because data is important."

In June 2015, Matthew Frazier had just graduated from NC State University with a bachelor's degree in computer science when he became an apprentice at GoTriangle. He says the apprenticeship was just a foot in the door because he was really interested in transit but had no idea how to make a career in the field. One of the advantages of the apprenticeship program, he says, is that anyone can apply, regardless of the kind of degree they have: "So you can be a computer scientist, be an English major, a history major, an architecture major," he says. "It gives anyone a pathway into transit."

Matthew Frazier pictured below

"It was really a very dive-in, head-first [experience] that allowed me to really see what goes on behind the curtain." – Matthew Frazier



He says he wasn't thrown into complex projects immediately but was put on meaningful projects over time and really gained an understanding of how transit works.

"I was sponsored by the service planning section, so I was helping them out a lot with developing service changes, writing schedules, writing reports," he says. "It was really a very dive-in, head-first [experience] that allowed me to really see what goes on behind the curtain. And I had to write progress reports about what I did during my apprenticeships, and I was like, 'Man, I'm really working on some pretty impactful projects.' ... I got to come up with a couple of ideas for route changes. Those were fun because some of my ideas even got implemented."

After the apprenticeship ended, Frazier stayed on as an intern and got the opportunity to work on streamlining some reporting processes. In November 2017, he became a full-time GoTriangle data specialist.

Casey Herkimer, an intern in GoTriangle's Information Technology Department, says the experience he has gained at GoTriangle will give him an edge in the job market. He expects to graduate with a bachelor's in industrial technology from East Carolina University in December. Herkimer began his GoTriangle internship in 2014 when he was studying for an associate's degree in applied science and information technology. Before he got the internship, he was working part-time as a Harris Teeter produce clerk as he studied for his associate's degree. *Casey Herkimer pictured below*



"I always wanted – at least at some point in college – to get a job or internship that deals with my field that I was studying in so that I can get more hands-on experience for any jobs I applied for," he says. "Because nowadays when you graduate from college, even if you apply for an entry-level position, they want [you to have] three years of experience under [your] belt. What I've really liked about this internship is the amount of hands-on experience that I'm gaining because they can teach you all they want in a classroom environment, but sometimes the best experience you have in a job field comes from actually doing work."

Herkimer's dogged determination to troubleshoot IT problems until he finds solutions is known among GoTriangle staff. For GoTriangle, the benefits of having interns and apprentices – like Casey – extend beyond their contributions, says GoTriangle Human Resources Administrator Christy Winstead.

"We get additional support without necessarily having to add on an additional full-time headcount," she says. "It's a good way to interact with the community, particularly individuals who are going to be graduating in fields where you may have a hard time recruiting in the future. You can kind of groom individuals as they are in school to eventually be able to fill a full-time position for you. It also gives your manager the opportunity to basically practice mentoring a student in the field. But a lot of times, we have hired the interns; they have transitioned to full-time positions." *Christy Winstead pictured at right*

Listening to fresh perspectives from those who have just stepped into the workplace for the first time is a trend with a future as the working world moves toward a team approach, Clark says.



"That's how things tend to work nowadays because there is a lot less top-down decision-making, and it's more bottom-up and lateral team-building," he says. "So I think that that's really how our organization has developed. It has become more of a team-building environment, and especially here in Operations."