

**AN LCAT INTERN'S EXPERIENCE**  
**David Gilstrap & Todd Rowley**  
**Lawn Care/Athletic Turf Management Program**  
**Crop and Soil Sciences, M.S.U.**

Placement training is the cornerstone of the educational opportunities available in the two-year program in Lawn Care/Athletic Turf Management (LCAT) at MSU. It typically occurs between a student's first and second years. This presentation will describe some particulars of placement training, which is what we call our internship program. We use the two terms interchangeably. Following this, we'll enlighten you on the experiences of one of last year's trainees.

Our placement training is an employment arrangement among the student, employer, and the LCAT Coordinator, David Gilstrap. All three parties sign a document that stipulates particulars such as dates of employment, job description, work schedule, wages, and overtime policy. This is not a binding contract but a statement of agreement and understanding. From the program's point of view, the most important thing is that the students put to practical use some concepts that they've learned in the classroom. It's best if they take on a variety of tasks and duties over the course of their internship. We also hope they experience some of the decision-making challenges that confront management personnel. Generally, we want them to return to school for their final year with a greater appreciation of what it takes to be successful in this industry. In addition, we hope that it is a worthwhile endeavor for the employer in terms of productivity and overall satisfaction. Of course, we also hope that they want to hire more interns in the future.

Placement training is a vital income source for the students. As a result, we find that their financial strains are usually less during their second year than in their first. In order to attract a student, employers must usually pay at least \$7.00 per hour. The opportunity to earn overtime compensation is a lure as well. Employers that can't pay overtime should offer a higher hourly wage if they hope to get a student's attention. The students deal directly with potential employers with regards to compensation specifics.

As with all of MSU's ag-tech programs, the spring semester ends early so that the interns can begin working by April 1. Most of them work through the first half of August for a total work period of twenty weeks. An MSU representative, usually the coordinator, visits at least once during this time. Students pay for and can receive up to six semester hours of credit. They must make monthly reports back to the coordinator. During the following semester they each make an oral presentation and submit a brief summary about their experiences.

Last year the students evaluated the oral presentations and voted on the best one. They selected Todd Rowley of Ionia, and he is here today to present a few slides that will give you further insight into the activities of an LCAT summer intern. Before they leave in the spring, all trainees must list their goals for their internships. Rowley's list was as follows:

- 1) hands-on experience,
- 2) variety of experience,
- 3) opportunity for full-time employment after graduation,
- 4) competitive-wage compensation, and
- 5) opportunities for overtime pay.

Rowley was fortunate to serve his internship with the Maintenance Division of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). His supervisors were Darwin Heme and Scott Wheeler, both of whom are in the audience today. The first three weeks of the internship were spent in the divisional office where Rowley updated the sprayer manual, product-label book and the material safety data sheets. All this was in preparation for the annual meeting of all certified pesticide applicators working for the agency.

Statewide, there are nine districts within MDOT. Rowley's first outdoor assignment was to help two districts with rest-area flower plantings. Following those two weeks, he toured the state conducting inspections. At each rest area he assessed the conditions of the shrubs, flowers, lawns, and trees. He paid particular attention to the turf areas deciding whether or not they needed renovation. If so, he estimated the area's size and potential for full-sun exposure along with collecting a soil sample.

These renovations became the focus for the rest of the summer. Rowley selected a seed mix and a starter fertilizer specific for each site's growing conditions. After calculating the amount needed for each location, he placed a master order for these supplies. With areas greater than 2,000 square feet, he synchronized his schedule with the district offices who would supply a tractor, planter, and operator. On smaller areas, Rowley used a walk-behind overseeder that he had already repaired and calibrated.

When Gilstrap paid his official visit, Rowley reviewed his list of goals. He did not have the opportunity for overtime compensation. However, he got to schedule his forty hours on Monday through Thursday. This enabled him to continue working Friday, Saturday, and most Sundays at an Ionia hardware store. Looking back, Rowley thought of additional accomplishments that he should have added to his list of goals. They are as follows:

- 6) working with other people
- 7) opportunity to make decisions, and
- 8) work-schedule flexibility.

An unrealized item was the opportunity full-time employment following graduation. Such a job offer has not been forthcoming from MDOT, since a hiring-freeze for permanent positions is in effect. However, they are welcoming him back as a temporary. If situations change, then Rowley might have an opportunity to begin a career with MDOT as a roadside turf specialist.

Rowley's story is one of many successes enjoyed this past summer by LCAT students. For more information about how to become a cooperator in this placement-training program, please call David Gilstrap at (517) 355-0207.