# SAP Learning Insights InternView Podcast

Transcript Episode 054 – Inside
SAP's Internship ExperienceProgram with Christine
Archer

Welcome to our new SAP Learning Insights mini series "InternView", a student-led podcast offering an insider's look at SAP's internship and early career opportunities.

In this debut episode, hosts JoAnn and Eden met with Christine Archer, Global Head of the SAP Internship Experience Program (iXp), for an in-depth conversation about intern life and career development opportunities at one of the world's largest software companies. Discover how SAP is pioneering new approaches to internships, helping over 2,000 interns each year unlock their full potential through the SAP Internship Experience Program (iXp).

Learn more about the SAP Internship Experience Program (iXp):
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Explore the various student opportunities at SAP: https://jobs.sap.com/content/Students/?locale=en_US
Learn how students can certify in SAP for free with SAP Learning Hub, student edition.
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# Transcript

Hello everyone, and thanks for tuning in to InternView, a podcast for students by students.

Today's episode, which is the first episode, will be hosted by myself, JoAnn and my colleague Eden.

Hi everyone.

InternView is a podcast by students, for students giving you a glimpse into SAP's experience, program, and student life at SAP.

So without further ado, let's introduce our first guest.

So we are lucky to have our first guest in person today with us here, Christine Archer, which means basically our boss.

So Christine, thank you for coming all the way from the US to be here with us today in person.

Absolutely.

I'm so, so excited to be here and honored to be the first guest. So, thank you for having me.

We heard that you are a big Phillies fan, so maybe you could tell us a bit about yourself and who Christine's outside of work.

Yes.

Well, I am from Philadelphia, originally moved a lot growing up, went to school in the South in the US, but I'm back in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia is home, and I am a very big sports fan.

I grew up a sports fan.

I actually wanted to be a sports reporter when I was going to school.

That's what my dream career was.

And I'm currently married.

I have two daughters who are 11 and 8, and I have two fur babies, 2 rescue dogs, which are also my everything.

And we love to travel, we love to spend time with family.

And really when I'm not working, I feel like a lot of my time is spent driving my daughters to all of their activities.

So I don't have quite as many as I would like to, but that's OK for where life is right now.

Great, great.

And in parallel to all of these things that you're already doing, how did you join SAP iXp?

Yeah, I've been in SAP almost eight years now.

I had to think about that.

It was my first global company and my whole career up to that point had been in learning and development.

And it's ironic because as I mentioned, my dream job was to be a sports reporter and I kind of fell into learning and development being my true dream career.

I did a lot of trial and error in my early to mid 20s trying to figure out where I was supposed to be when the sports reporter thing did not work out, so I came to SAP.

I worked in learning and development and about 5 1/2 years ago the role opened to lead iXp and I, I thought it was perfect because it's learning and development.

But for those early in their career.

And I can so empathize with what it's like to be early on.

Maybe not sure what you want to do or maybe thinking you know what you want to do, but the world may have other plans and, and that can be scary.

So it felt like a really perfect opportunity to do what I love, but also bring a piece of me where I could really empathize with those that I'm hopefully working on behalf of and for.

It was my first people manager role.

That was also always a dream of mine to be a manager of people.

It's something I'm really passionate about.

So just all the stars aligned and 5 1/2 years later, the program has grown beyond anything I could have imagined.

I work with an incredible team beyond anything I could have imagined.

So everything just worked out, I think the way it was meant to.

Perfect.

And will you say that's the reason like, or your motivation behind leading SAP iXp like that you can relate to it?

Ah yes, yes, I would.

I, I think there's something really special about playing a part in someone's career.

And to me, it's even more special to play a part in these formative years of one's career story.

These are the years when people really figure out who they are and where your first role out of school or your second job may not be your forever job, but I think that's really where you start to pick up your confidence, your self-awareness and to be in a position to get to contribute to that for someone.

You know, you may not always remember the details of every job you have in your life, but you always remember your internships.

You always remember those early career moments.

And we get to be a part of that.

And I think that that's a privilege.

And that is something that even on the most stressful of days, I remember that and I just immediately get excited to do it all over again the next day.

So yeah, that's definitely what drives me.

That's so nice.

And speaking of like the formative years of early career and early talent, we've already been talking a little bit about SAP iXp.

But for the viewers or the listeners that are external, could you tell us a little bit about the program for people that have nothing to do with SAP?

It's my favorite topic.

I would love to.

So SAP iXp, it stands for the SAP Internship Experience Program.

So iXp is is short for that.

And the idea is that SAP is such a large company, and we have such a vast customer base.

So the company does so many things and has so many functions to it.

So as such we've got a very large employee base, over 110,000 employees and we hire so many students.

We hire students from every function for every part of the business.

A lot of people assume that we only hire engineers or data scientists, but we don't.

And what we found was when interns come in, they learn in the job.

Of course they're here, they're working with a team, they're doing real life business solutioning and deliverables.

But we needed to create a consistent, streamlined platform where all interns, no matter what country they're in or what year of school they're in or what part of the business they're working, they're getting a consistent experience learning about SAP as a company, not just under the lens of marketing or legal or wherever they might be in the world.

And that they're working on those universally critical skills that no matter if you're in a technical space or a customer facing space, we all need to work on our executive presence, on our emotional intelligence, on our communication skills.

That's a given for everyone.

So SAP iXp is a learning and development program that exists to be a supplemental layer of a student's day-to-day experience because again, they're doing a job too and they're learning in that job.

But SAP iXp offers a curriculum of robust learning experiences to make sure that all interns are also getting certain fundamental experiences, skills, networking, career development as its own topic.

So with that, they're getting a very well-rounded experience that hopefully, if we're doing it right,

that we're driving their development in a way that they are ready for that first job once they graduate.

And in a perfect world, that's at SAP and they continue their story here.

And would you say that's why you would recommend doing an internship with SAP and not like any other company.

Absolutely. Listen, I did internships a million years ago when I was in school.

I did a few internships and sadly, they were the stereotypical.

Like I literally got coffee for people.

I literally ran someone's errands one day.

And I, I think that led to me being a bit lost when I graduated.

The sports reporter thing didn't pan out and I did not know what else to do because I really didn't try anything else.

I didn't get any real-life work experience.

So I'm very passionate from a personal perspective that that's what an internship should be.

Try things out, realize what you love, realize what you don't love.

I think that's just as valuable.

And what I know that SAP does really well is that we afford students that opportunity.

Come in, you're going to be treated like any other professional.

You're going to be given real life; real important business needs related work and you're going to get a chance to find yourself and network and learn from the best and brightest minds all over the world.

So I'm a little biased because it is my mission that that is what we're giving students, and we are.

And we're able to do that too because SAP as a company is very committed to students and early talents.

It doesn't get more committed than our CEO being a graduate of our, one of our student programs and building quite a successful career since then.

So SAP is such a great employer in terms of seeing the value of students and early talents, investing in them, giving them a space to grow.

And for that reason, I would say students, make sure you are making informed decisions about where you invest yourself because sure, you're getting work experience and that benefits you, but don't be mistaken, companies are benefiting from you too.

So make sure that when you do internships, it's at a company that will appreciate that and respect that and you'll get back from it as much if not more than what you put in.

Yeah, yeah, that's so true.

And adding on to the holistic skills that we acquire at SAP iXp and also the day-to-day experiences, I guess, is there anything that you would encourage interns to attend or try in their early talents years?

Yes, I know.

I know how hard it is.

I know how overwhelming it can be.

You're in school, you've got your studies, your homework, you probably have family obligations, or other aspects of life that want your time.

But I implore students, take advantage of every opportunity that a company gives you.

And SAP has so many.

There's always a leadership session going on.

There's always a networking event.

We have employee network groups, whether it be Pride@SAP or the Business Women's Network.

There are so many opportunities to dial into a call and listen to someone share their experience or take a training from our very vast Success Map Learning library or join an event or go to an office activity and just meet people.

And it can be very easy to say, oh, I won't because I've got to focus on my studies.

Of course you do, but you never know what one hour session will light a spark in you to say, wow, I never realized AI was so fascinating.

I now want to learn everything I can.

You never know at what networking event or coffee gathering at the office you might meet your next mentor.

So, I implore interns to the best way that you can: Manage your time!

Think about what you want to get out of a company and invest time in doing that and take advantage of the opportunities in front of you to do that because this is a very precious time in life.

You're only a student for a finite amount of years, even if you go on to graduate school.

So play that student card and say, listen, I'm here to learn and I'm going to stretch myself as much as I can to learn as much as I can because there will always be a return on that investment.

So actually, I did my internship with SAP as well.

Excellent.

I love to hear that.

And SAP iXp was actually the reason why I decided to do my internship.

I had to do it with my university and with SAP. And because I love the different opportunities you have and that you're basically never alone in like this big company and everything is like coming to you so fast.

And it's within SAP iXp felt like there are always people to rely on and to us like for help.

And so I would say SAP iXp is like really a great opportunity to use.

And that's why I love like that you mentioned that students should think about more than just getting work experience, like feel comfortable where you actually have to work and feel appreciated.

So yeah, thank you for sharing that.

I love to hear that.

You know, something that adults are very good at is assuming they know exactly what to do, drawing on experience, especially as someone gets further in their career.

On one hand, that's what you're hired for.

You have experience, you can make decisions.

But I think that can be very dangerous, especially when we talk about a program for others.

Because if I came in and just said: "This is the program that students want" or "I know what early talents are looking for", I may or may not be accurate.

Probably not so accurate because it's been a minute since I was a student or a recent graduate.

And I think that's really important and something my team and I are very passionate about. That while we do have expertise and we do have passion for this, we also are very open about the fact and excited about the fact that we don't know everything that there is to know about what our interns are looking for.

And we see that as an exciting challenge and really a reason to keep the lines of communication open.

And I think that's important for anyone, no matter how far they get in their career.

Your career is like one big group project, honestly.

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No matter how siloed your job might be, you always have to know how to connect with others and influence outcomes through others.

And the only way to do that is to stay curious about what others want and need from you, not assuming that they're going to adjust based on your preferences.

So back to the great question, how do we make sure that this program continues to flex and evolve around the diverse needs and interests of a very broad student population is a couple different ways.

We do try to maintain open lines of communication and we do that sometimes by just passive channels.

We have a central e-mail address that any student, hiring manager, anyone can reach our team at any time.

It's a global team, so there's always someone online 24 hours a day, around the globe.

We do have an app on our SharePoint page that collects Q&A questions in real time.

So we do have some avenues where passively questions can reach us or information can be gathered.

We have a SharePoint site.

We post on social media through "Life At SAP", but we also proactively will seek input. And we do that in a few different ways.

We do have a bi-annual survey where we send an anonymous survey to interns and hiring managers because we need to make sure their needs are being met as well.

Where we ask for that very pointed feedback.

We have a quarterly open call, it's called "SAP iXp What's next"? Where it's 30 minutes [in total]: 15 minutes are us giving an update to everyone about what we're doing and what we're about to do in the next quarter. 15 minutes just for open dialogue.

What are your questions?

What can we explain?

What are your ideas?

So that's another avenue.

And then we have some other methods. Each location has an intern committee, which is volunteer [based]. Interns can raise their hand and say, I'd love to be a bit more involved in steering the local presence and event calendar of the program.

So our intern committee gives us thoughts and ideas and input there best suited for that because they are students themselves.

On the hiring manager side, we have a hiring manager advisory group.

So they also act as kind of spokespeople for managers of students and letting us know what they're seeing in the business, what they'd love to see through their interns.

So we can then plan a program that speaks to those needs and meet everyone in the middle.

So I think it's swallowing your pride and admitting that no matter how long I've done this or how good I might think I am, I will never know more than the audience I'm solving for.

So how can I make sure we're giving everyone a platform to give us that input?

And then how do we hold ourselves accountable to react and respond to that input?

Yeah.

And it's great to hear that there's constant development, open lines of communication input for improvements or suggestions.

So that's really reassuring because we don't always get this opportunity during internships.

But on the topic of constant development and change, what would you say are the top three biggest challenges that you face as a leader of SAP iXp?

Oh, so the first one that comes to mind is it is such a vast audience and it's a very fluid audience.

We have interns that join every week.

We have interns that exit every week.

We have interns that are with us as short as 10 weeks in some locations.

We have interns that could be with us up to two years in other locations.

So we're putting on a program that in our hope is valuable and meaningful for everyone, but everyone is as diverse as one could anticipate in a global company.

And my team and I, our mantra is that we always want the program to be globally consistent, but also locally relevant. Because the roles that will be open at the early talent level in our labs location are just going to be different than in a field office.

So we need to make sure our program is driving development in a way that is locally relevant and that is a very hard line to manage: globally consistent, locally relevant.

And then our interns are also so diverse.

We will have second year undergrad, we will have MBA level interns who maybe worked for 10 years and then went back to school.

So that is the biggest challenge and I use the word challenge in a positive way because again, it is exciting.

We will never have the market corner on the perfect way to run this program and for some people that might feel defeating. [Whereas] I think I speak for my team: We find that exciting because every day there's something new and different to consider.

But that's a big challenge to one of our biggest definitions of success which is conversions [to full-time employees].

We want to see our interns who want to be here, we want them to find a place to be here.

And that is an outcome that we don't control.

We can influence it to a certain extent, but we can't control headcount when it's available or where it's available.

We cannot control hiring manager decisions.

So that's another challenge that there are things we want to achieve. And some of those things we do completely control and some of those things we're just constantly ideating about who can we partner with, what tool can we develop, what process do we need in place.

So that is a constant topic that we're trying to tackle, I would say.

And the third is, you know, if you think about SAP and who our competitors are, many of them are what we would call B2C, they are business to consumer [companies].

Consumers touch their products.

So everyone knows Google because everyone uses Google, right?

SAP is a B2B [company].

Our biggest success is through our customers.

We help our customers find success. And while that's something I think at SAP we're proud of, and that's kind of our identity, that we are behind the scenes doing incredible work, that can create a challenge.

When we talk about attracting the best and brightest and most diverse workforce at the student level, that brand awareness on campus, varies [around the globe].

In Germany, it likely isn't as much of a challenge as in some parts of the world where SAP might not be as prominent as an employer. They might not have an arena named after them where, you know, people don't realize that they are using our products, and they know people that use our products.

So we do some things to try to mitigate that.

We have a university alliances group at SAP that builds partnerships with universities, actually has the universities use our software so their students are learning our products.

But it's a big world out there and there's a lot of universities.

So I think probably the third biggest challenge is just constantly thinking about how do we get out there and spread the word to those that haven't yet crossed SAP's path that: "Hey, this is a pretty awesome company. Maybe you haven't heard of us, but I promise you, if you come in here, you're going to do great things, you're going to love it."

That doesn't come as easily as maybe [for] some other companies where the name recognition is just a bit more organic.

And besides, like all the challenges, I'm sure there are a few successes.

Is there something specifically that comes to mind when you think of iXp?

Yeah, I would say SAP has so many resources.

I don't know if I mentioned it while we were recording or it was before we started recording, but I've been here 8 years, my first global company.

And so I've worked at several companies, I've worked in different industries, I've worked in government, I've worked in healthcare, health insurance, and I've never worked for a company that had so much opportunity.

Most companies I've worked with, the way up was to be a people manager.

That was it.

Not everyone wants to be a people manager.

Not everyone should be a people manager even if they want to.

But that was the only way.

[At] SAP you can be a people manager, you can be a project manager, you can be an expert.

So I never worked anywhere that had so many different avenues and options.

I never worked anywhere that had such a vast learning and development repository.

So like the coaching and mentoring tool, which interns are welcome and allowed to use.

And I always make sure they know that it exists.

So if you're listening and you weren't sure, it's out there.

I've never worked somewhere that had an option to sign up for a coworker that could be a mentor or a coach, the fellowship program, which if you are an FTE (full-time employee), you have the opportunity to do another job for a few months.

I've never worked anywhere that offered that.

So I think one of the benefits of SAP iXp has, it's we happen to be within a company that already offers so many things to its employees, and many of those things are also offered to our students.

And it is truly, again, a company that prioritizes students and recent graduates more than any other company I've ever seen.

Leaders get communications telling them we want you to see X percent of your hires being recent grads.

I've never worked anywhere that operationalized that into a goal that they measured.

So I think those are some of the many perks of, of SAP iXp and benefits that a student here could take advantage of.

Yeah.

And I also think that's something we experience working for SAP, that we really feel equal. Even though we know we have our managers that we have to follow and they give us like the instructions, but we feel equal in so many ways.

Like we feel heard.

We feel like appreciated and I think that's really also because of iXp because like you ensure that like the managers listen to us, that they hear us, that they care for us and then actually think about like what is best for our interns.

So they stay and stay for as like working students just like I do now.

And yes, just because I loved my internship experience, otherwise I would probably [have] left the company.

So right, I love to hear that.

And that's so important because everyone's human at the end of the day, and everyone wants to feel important and seen and heard.

And it can be very easy to not feel that way in a large organization, especially if not all of your team sits in the same place.

And for students, it can be overwhelming.

They don't know if they should speak up in meetings.

They don't know if it's safe to have an opinion.

And what we on my team really try to cascade it is reminding managers of that.

And many of our managers at SAP naturally do feel the same way.

We work with incredible leaders around the world, but intention doesn't always equal outcome.

So that is I think another value that my team and I try to bring is breaking it down to leaders to say, have you thought about what this generation is, how they communicate, what motivates them?

It may or may not be different than the others on your team.

So we kind of remind them and give tools of how best to develop this talent segment and position them for success.

Yeah, we're already at the end of our time.

Time flies when you're having a good time.

But before you leave us, we would like to know or to ask you something that "AI wants to know". It is our special category now.

OK, excellent.

The question is: If you could swap jobs with anyone else in the world for me, who would it be and why?

Oh, if I could swap jobs with anyone in the world. My mind is going in so many different directions right now.

Think of the sports.

See, that's where my mind went.

You know, old habits die hard.

The first thing that came to mind was being a sports reporter and living that life that I was so convinced was for me for a week. I think it would be awesome and I'd probably realize that I'm where I'm supposed to be.

And so I get that validation that: "No, it's OK to be a sports fan. It didn't need to be your career. You really are where you can make the most impact."

But some other thoughts that came to mind.

I'd love to like work on a cruise ship and like sing. I'm not a good singer, but I love a microphone and I love cruise ships.

So entertaining, or maybe: both of my fur babies are rescue dogs. And so, another dream of mine is to one day have enough money that any dog that needs a home or is mistreated, I can bring them on this like farm sanctuary and just give them the very best life.

So all of those things, if I could do all of this for a week, I'm in.

Wow, what a great topic to end our first podcast episode on. Thank you so much, Christine, for joining us.

Thank you both.

This was incredible.

You could not convince me that you both haven't been doing podcasts for years.

You were amazing.

So thank you so much.

And remember with the SAP Internship Experience program, you're not just gaining experience, but you're expanding your horizons.

Thank you and until next time, bye.