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# Living With the Boss

By AMANDA M. FAIRBANKS

If you want to find out what it's like to be Gail Hochman, a New York literary agent, it wouldn't be enough to merely follow her around during the workday. You'd have to follow her home for the night and back to the office the next morning — because it is during her daily commute that Ms. Hochman, 56, goes about the business of poring over unpublished manuscript after unpublished manuscript.

"They range from terrible to sort of terrible to maybe this one could actually make it," she said.

Ms. Hochman, whose clients include [Scott Turow](#), [Michael Cunningham](#) and Julia Glass, recently broke with tradition and divvied up her usual 40-pound pile into two additional heaps — one for Amanda Sweet, the other for Julia Gold, two seniors from Carleton College in Minnesota who dutifully followed Ms. Hochman's every directive.

Both Ms. Sweet and Ms. Gold moved into Ms. Hochman's Park Slope townhouse for the duration of their recent weeklong spring break as a sort of modern-day apprenticeship. "If you want to succeed in publishing, you go to New York," said Ms. Sweet, a Milwaukee native who dreams of a career in publishing, whether in New York or Chicago.

While classmates were lapping up tropical drinks or catching up on sleep, Ms. Sweet and Ms. Gold were among the dozen or so students participating in externships, which are essentially job-shadowing opportunities that can last a day or two weeks.

Externships have long been a required part of medical training: nursing students get practical experience trailing their registered-nurse elders.

Adapting the concept, many colleges and universities now coordinate externships for their undergraduates. These programs give graduates a way to connect with their alma mater beyond the usual check-writing. And in a bad economy, with jobs and internships scarce, they give students some perspective on potential career paths at a heavily discounted rate, as well as a chance to try out what they've learned.

"I'm missing a week that I would have otherwise spent on the couch," said Ms. Gold, a senior, in between bites of an omelette during a lunch break. Neither women had spent more than \$40 by week's end. "But it's been a good investment in my future, time well spent."

Home-stay externships are hardly unique to Carleton. Gettysburg College and [Swarthmore College](#) in Pennsylvania, Kalamazoo College in Michigan, Centre College in Kentucky and Luther College in Iowa offer them during breaks in the academic year.

"We call it test-driving a career," said Mike Norris, director of communications at Centre College, which began coordinating externships in 2002. "It often leads to networking and, in the best cases, to summer jobs."

Luther College's three-year-old externship program originated as a way of re-engaging alumni in campus life. Last year, 29 students participated. Mark Peltz, assistant dean and director of Luther's career center, says that before sending students on their way, he is not beyond reminding them to help clear the dinner table or to make their beds.

"You're an ambassador to the college," he said. "Some alumni hosts are benefactors to the college, and we would hate to have those relationships compromised."

Professions with boundaries extending beyond 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. are particularly well suited to a home stay. For instance, during a three-day stint, one Luther student accompanied a physician who delivered more than a dozen babies, many arriving in the middle of the night. Another student shadowed a singer with the [Metropolitan Opera](#), who naturally had

an untraditional work schedule. “With some professions, not having the home stay shields you from what it’s actually like,” Mr. Peltz said.

Indeed, externships can inject a badly needed dose of reality into the college experience.

“A lot of great schools don’t prepare you for real life, there’s no professional development,” said Aleshia Mueller, who graduated from Carleton in 2001 and now runs Reel Nomad Productions, a media production company in Minneapolis. Ms. Mueller agreed to allow Kristen Asp to sleep on the sofa of her one-bedroom duplex over spring break.

Ms. Asp, a cinema and media studies major, says she has had a difficult time finding internships in either film or television. She leaped at the opportunity to learn alongside Ms. Mueller, who, unlike Ms. Asp’s professors, doesn’t wax nostalgic about cutting 35-millimeter film.

“The way I’m trying to get into this industry is more similar to the way that she went about it,” said Ms. Asp between edit breaks. She described the one-bedroom accommodation as a significant improvement over college dormitory life, especially with its walk-in closet.

Back in Brooklyn, Ms. Sweet occupied the now-vacant bedroom of Ms. Hochman’s son, who is a senior at Pomona College in Claremont, Calif.; Ms. Hochman’s daughter is a Carleton sophomore, and Ms. Gold assumed temporary ownership of her bedroom, plastered with photos of movie stars.

While hosting externs in no way filled Ms. Hochman’s empty nest, old habits die hard.

Her mother-hen tendencies were on display: like warning the girls that their ears might pop on the way up to the Brandt & Hochman literary agency on the 23rd floor of a Manhattan tower or pulling them back from the platform when they were too close to approaching subway trains.

“At other internships, your boss gives you something to do and says if you run out of stuff, to ask them for more,” said Ms. Gold, who says she plans to contact Ms. Hochman after graduating in June.

“Here,” she said, “you’re seeing the whole life and all the work that gets taken home — the constant reading, the endless stacks of paper.”