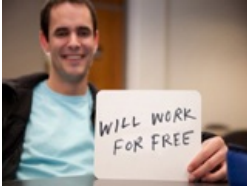


## UNPAID STUDENT INTERNS, FACE UNFORESEEN MISERY AND EMPLOYER ABUSE



Faced with the worst job market for a very long-long time, grads are turning to unpaid internships, to use them as a leverage platform that could help them get a job. Unpaid internships, after finishing college, have long been associated with the film and nonprofit worlds, but of late are also being offered by fashion houses, book publishers, marketing companies, and public relations firms among others. However, not all unpaid internships provide training, experience and help open a window of employment opportunity – some of the grads have had bitter experiences. Interns complain about having to do menial work and having very little to learn. Melissa Reyes, a Marist College graduate, got an unpaid internship at the fashion house Diane von Furstenberg. “They talked about what an excellent, educational internship program this would be,” she said. But she soon became very bitter. She worked 12 hour days and “They had me running out to buy them lunch. They had me cleaning out the closets, emptying out the past season’s items.” Eric Glatt, 40, took Fox Searchlight Pictures, to court for minimum wage violations. He said that he was not paid for the personnel work he performed for the film “Black Swan.” Fox Searchlight denied the allegation saying it has complied with the law. “I knew that this was going to be a normal job and I wasn’t going to be paid for it,” he said. “But it started kicking around in my mind how unjust this was. It’s just become part of this unregulated labor market. “The purpose of filing this case was to help end this practice,” said Mr. Glatt, who now plans to go to law school. “That was more important than my working on the next blockbuster.” Two basic federal laws govern unpaid internships. The Labor Department says that the work cannot be used as a substitute for regular employees and the work should not be of immediate benefit to the employer. However, exploitation of interns continues unabated. Interns do not complain as they do not want to jeopardize future job opportunities. Employers know that the Labor Department rarely cracks down on offending employers. Ross Eisenbrey, a vice president at the Economic Policy Institute said, “A few years ago you hardly heard about college graduates taking unpaid internships. But now I’ve even heard of people taking unpaid internships after graduating from Ivy League schools.” Matt Gioe said that his boss sent him on errands to buy groceries. He had taken up unpaid internship, to get hands-on experience with a Manhattan agency. All he did was answer phones and look up venues. “It was basically three wasted months,” he said. Not all had bitter experiences. Emily Miethner, fine arts major at Hofstra, said that the knowledge she gained at the two places where she went for internship, after graduating, were crucial in her landing a \$35,000 a year job as a social media coordinator. Ross Perlin, author of the 2011 book “Intern Nation,” said that internship jobs had moved beyond the film industry, to which they were earlier confined. “The people in charge in many industries were once interns and they’ve come of age, and to them unpaid internships are completely normal and they think of having interns in every way, shape and form,” he said.