

Developing a Quality Internship Program: A manual for Organizations and Supervisors

Adapted from resources provided by Michael True, Director,
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Please visit the employer page of the CDC website for additional resources and full program details!

<http://www.smcm.edu/careercenter/employers.html>

INTRODUCTION

How can organizations meet their needs today and prepare the workforce of the future? The ideal scenario is to hire experienced employees who require very little, if any, training. But this dream sometimes conflicts with reality. One solution is to develop a quality internship program that provides current college students with the capacity to build a relevant skill-set in a pre-professional setting. This booklet will assist you in doing just that.

What is an internship?

An internship is any carefully monitored work or service experience in which a student has intentional learning goals and reflects actively on what she or he is learning throughout the experience. Characteristics include:

- ✦ Development of an intentional “learning agenda” that provides structure for the experience (this important element distinguishes an internship from a short term job or volunteer work)
- ✦ Learning activities such as development of objectives, observation, reflection, evaluation, and assessment
- ✦ An effort to establish a reasonable balance between the intern’s learning goals and the specific work that in organization needs done
- ✦ Promotion of academic, career and/or personal development
- ✦ A general structure that provides for a one-time, short-term, full or part-time experience; a typical experience usually lasts from three to six months
- ✦ Careful monitoring and evaluation of the “learning agenda”

Adapted from materials published by the *National Society for Experiential Education* (NSEE)

How do internships benefit employers?

- ✦ Interns are highly motivated pre-professionals
- ✦ Students bring new perspectives to old problems
- ✦ The visibility of your organization is increased
- ✦ Interns make quality candidates for temporary or seasonal positions and projects
- ✦ Interns provide freedom for professional staff to pursue more creative projects
- ✦ Using interns increases flexibility because they are a cost-effective work force that does not requiring a long-term employer commitment
- ✦ Internships are a proven, cost-effective way to recruit and evaluate potential employees
- ✦ Your image in the community is enhanced as you contribute your expertise to the educational enterprise

The success of an internship depends on the partnership between representatives of the organization, the College, and the student. These three parties should ultimately agree on the conditions of the internship, the responsibilities of each party, and the reporting requirements.

How does a credit internship differ from a non-credit internship?

Participation in the credit internship process has advantages for both the intern and the employer. Among other things, doing so better enables the intern to connect their experience to

their curriculum and increases accountability. Of course, if we are going to award credit for an internship, it must include work on substantive projects and the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills relevant to the field. If you have a credit intern working with your organization, the intern's site supervisor can expect the following:

- ✦ Submit a new Site Approval Form if a current one (<5 years) is not on file
- ✦ To work with the student to articulate specific responsibilities and learning objectives on the Learning Agreement that are unique to the student's goals and skills as well as to the organization's current needs. The learning agreement also requires contact information for the organization, an established schedule for the intern, and a signature indicating agreement with our site supervisor statement.
- ✦ To work with us to arrange for a site visit if our schedule allows.
- ✦ To provide feedback on the intern's performance at the end of the internship by completing our standard evaluation form at the end of the experience

In addition, the student will:

- ✦ Be expected to complete a minimum number of hours at the site (40 hours per hour of credit earned; schedule is established on the Learning Agreement)
- ✦ Have an SMCM faculty sponsor who guides the student in the development of a related academic project and provides the final grade for the project and internship as a whole
- ✦ Engage in a number of structured reflections over the course of the internship that will be read by CDC staff and the faculty sponsor
- ✦ (Note that students are generally expected to work on these assignments outside of the internship hours, though interns are encouraged to consult the supervisor as relevant in order to complete them)

Note that credit internships can be paid or unpaid, though we encourage organizations to pay or provide some sort of stipend if possible. If the intern is unpaid, it is important that the learning benefit to the student be at least as great as the benefit to the organization in order for the organization to be in compliance with federal labor laws (see our website for details).

DESIGNING AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM THAT MEETS YOUR NEEDS

As varied as organizations are in age, size, industry and product, so too are their internship activities. How do you know what kind of program will work best for you? Designing an internship program to meet your needs is relatively straightforward.

Step 1: Set goals

- ✦ What does your organization hope to achieve from the program?
- ✦ Are you a small organization searching for additional help on a project?
- ✦ Is your organization growing quickly and having difficulty finding motivated new employees?
- ✦ Is your organization looking for new employees with management potential?

A careful discussion with management can create a consensus on program goals that can be understood by all involved. The program and internship can be designed to best meet those expectations. As many staffing professionals may know, in order for a program to be successful, it will require the commitment of management.

Step 2: Develop a plan

Draft a job description that clearly explains the intern's duties. Do you want an intern to work on a specific project? Would you also expect an intern to provide general support around the workplace? Can you give the intern a taste of everything your company does? Outline the structure the internship ahead of time so you can be sure to meet your goals and to develop an opportunity that will be valuable to the intern.

Step 3: Recruit interns

In order to be listed in our searchable internship database and featured as a local pre-approved internship site, you must have a current Site Approval Form on file. The site approval form is available in the employer page of our site, and can be submitted electronically as an email attachment. Organizations will be asked to update their information every five years. Students with an interest in interning with your organization during an upcoming semester or break will be encouraged to contact you directly via telephone or email, at which time we encourage you to ask for a cover letter and resume, and then conduct a formal interview. Be sure to choose your interns carefully. As with an employee, you want to be sure that their skills and goals are a good fit for your organization. Once you have agreed to accept a given intern into your program, he or she should report begin completing the program paperwork on our website in order to register for credit. This process can take weeks to complete, so it is important that you identify interns well before their anticipated start date (i.e., March for Summer and Fall, November for Spring). If you have a strong need for an intern during a given time, we can engage in additional promotion in order to increase your likelihood of finding a student for the special project or program (please contact us several months in advance!).

Step 4: Manage the intern

The beginning days of the internship program are often its defining days. When you give an intern their first tasks, you are signaling what will be expected in the future. Avoid giving them very little to do because it sends a message that this job will be easy — and uninteresting. Interns don't want that, and of course, neither do employers. The organization of your internship program will be the single most important influence on an intern's impression of your organization. The details in this manual will help you to plan for success.

DEVELOPING WORK ACTIVITIES AND MEASURABLE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

A large part of producing effective position descriptions involves the development of challenging work assignments that complement students' academic programs. One way to do this is to design a preliminary list of work activities that will fit the needs of your department. A detailed description of typical tasks on our Site Approval Form will help us to promote your internship or field experience, and to screen the right candidates for the position. Later, when the interns you select join your team, you will have a chance to review the work activities and modify them according to the interns' knowledge and personal work/learning goals.

Just like any course a student takes, the credit internship is guided by a syllabus. The syllabus is complemented by a Learning Agreement, which includes a description of the intern's unique responsibilities and learning objectives, and thus serves as a guide and contract between the intern, the site supervisor, and the faculty sponsor. It also includes preliminary details about the academic project that is to be submitted to the faculty sponsor.

As part of the educational process, internship work activities should focus on projects specifically related to the degree the interns expect to receive. Students should not be expected to simply perform menial tasks; rather they should work to apply their expertise to a business environment. An internship is not a part time job; it is part of an academic program and should offer every opportunity to link classroom learning to workplace experience.

Undergraduate students expect and appreciate clear direction regarding what is expected of them and require frequent feedback concerning what and how they have done. In an academic environment, clear direction and periodic feedback are customary. It is also important that the interns perceive their work is making a useful contribution to the sponsoring organization.

A particular concern at the undergraduate level is that the work assignments provide the interns with a variety of tasks, while accommodating the needs of the organization. Of course, some of the interns' responsibilities will involve repetition; all work involves some repeated activity. We are suggesting, however, the program be designed to maximize the scope of the students' organizational experience.

Sample tasks that undergraduate students have provided for their sponsoring organizations include the following:

- ✦ Performing laboratory tests
- ✦ Writing handbooks or manuals
- ✦ Designing posters, charts, graphs
- ✦ Generating financial forecast and cost recovery reports
- ✦ Performing software/hardware modifications
- ✦ Conducting research and surveys
- ✦ Developing slide/sound presentations
- ✦ Compiling technical reports
- ✦ Generating marketing plans
- ✦ Conducting training packages
- ✦ Preparing budgets and financial reports

Developing challenging work assignments is a major thrust of the position description. Your final internship description will incorporate the needs of your organization as well as the abilities and academic goals of the students you take on.

ORIENTING AND TRAINING INTERNS

Many students are unfamiliar with the activities, environment and objectives of business and industry. Even if your interns may have worked part-time to support their education, they may not have been exposed to organizational politics, confidentiality issues in the workplace, the importance of teamwork, or the profit-making orientation of business. The orientation and training dimension of an internship experience emphasizes the partnership role of the sponsoring organization. Experience shows that employers who take adequate time at the beginning of the internship to orient the student reap productivity and effectiveness more quickly than those who don't.

The sooner your student interns understand what your organization does and how it operates, the sooner they can assume assigned responsibilities and become productive. You can support this aspect of the learning process by providing the following kinds of information about your site:

Prior to the first day

- ✦ Outline work expectations for the duration of the internship
- ✦ Prepare forms to be signed, including a confidentiality agreement, if necessary
- ✦ Set up an organized work area for the intern, including phone, voicemail, computer, email, and internet access and/or other resources necessary for them to accomplish the tasks you have stipulated in the internship position description

Explain the mission of the organization

- ✦ How did the organization start? Why?
- ✦ What is unique about your product or service?
- ✦ Who benefits from your product or service?
- ✦ What are the organization's current objectives?
- ✦ How may the intern contribute to those objectives?

Explain the organization structure

- ✦ Who reports to whom?
- ✦ Who, specifically, is the intern's supervisor?
- ✦ What is the intern's department responsible for?
- ✦ How are decisions made?
- ✦ Which personnel can answer different kinds of questions?
- ✦ Show the intern how to get around the facility with a tour and/or a map
- ✦ Let your intern know that it is okay to walk around and observe others at work, or ask other employees questions about the nature of their work
- ✦ Give your intern company materials to read such as newsletters, annual reports, an organization chart, or memos from the CEO

Outline organizational rules, policies, decorum and expectations

- ✦ Is there special industry jargon?
- ✦ What are the specific work standards and procedures?
- ✦ What access to the supervisor (days, times, and duration) does the intern have?
- ✦ How should they process requests?
- ✦ How do the mail and telephone systems work?
- ✦ What are the approved forms for correspondence?
- ✦ By what safety regulations must they abide?
- ✦ Is there a procedure for signing off completed work?
- ✦ What periodic forms or reports need to be completed?
- ✦ What local, state, and/or federal guidelines or laws apply to their work?
- ✦ Are there security or confidentiality issues the intern should be aware of?
- ✦ What is acceptable with regard to dress and appearance?
- ✦ How should they maintain the premises and their work area?
- ✦ Encourage your interns to spend break/lunch times in places where employees gather

Define the intern's responsibilities

- ✦ What is the intern's role?
- ✦ What projects will be assigned to him or her?
- ✦ What resources are available to the intern?
- ✦ What training is necessary?
- ✦ How does the organization want the intern to deal with clients and vendors?
- ✦ What tasks can be completed without supervisory approval?
- ✦ Do other employees understand the intern's role?
- ✦ Provide your intern with opportunities to observe (or participate in) professional meetings

Monitor the intern's adjustment and understanding of what is expected

- ✦ Make yourself visibly available to the intern by scheduling regular one-on-one meetings with them
- ✦ Assign someone who can periodically "check-in" with the intern
- ✦ Provide feedback and constructive criticism
- ✦ Force the intern to ask questions

Don't forget to:

Give your intern the resources he or she needs to do the job. That may sound obvious, but you may be surprised to know that some companies do not provide a permanent workspace for interns. Lack of consistent resources gives interns the impression that they are not important or not welcome in your office. Do your best to provide the intern a desk, point out the supply room, and introduce the tech support people. If you do not have a traditional office setting, be sure to include all of the resources appropriate to your company or organization.

Keep an eye on the intern. There is no need watch an intern's every move, but do communicate with them on a daily basis. Watch for signs that the intern is confused or bored. As often as silence means that an intern is busy, it also could mean that he or she is too shy to ask a question or relay a problem to you. Paying attention to your intern can prevent problems and bad habits.

Provide feedback to your intern. If your interns have never done the kind of work that you expect of them before, they will need an assessment of their performance in order to improve. No matter what the level of experience, they need you to examine their work and make suggestions.

Evaluate the intern's progress every now and then. A few weeks after the internship begins, you should evaluate how well you and your intern are meeting the established goals and objectives. You should consider the quality and timeliness of the work produced to date, ability to take and follow direction, work habits, and areas needing growth and development. Evaluation processes differ; they can be as formal as written evaluations every three weeks or as informal as occasional lunches. Some companies have the intern evaluate the experience and the company as well in a formal exit interview. Again, your structure is largely up to your corporate culture and needs. We do ask that you complete our standard evaluation form at the end of the internship; details are provided under "Supervising Interns."

Keep your focus on the future. If you take on interns now, you'll have a competitive advantage in recruiting the best workers-you'll already be known to the employees you want most. Your new workers will already be trained for your workplace and loyal to your company, lowering training time, recruiting costs and turnover rates. You'll build a reputation that will pay off with students, colleges and the community. And your company will save money while benefiting from the input of talented, enthusiastic, innovative people. With all of these advantages, you might find that you can't afford not to do internships.

SUPERVISING INTERNS

As an intern supervisor, you use all the skills necessary in any effective supervisory relationship:

- ✦ Providing leadership
- ✦ Motivating
- ✦ Delegating
- ✦ Communicating
- ✦ Developing and training
- ✦ Evaluating

Additionally, the students will look to you as a mentor who will assist their transition from the classroom to the work environment. Since the internship is an extension of the learning process, you will need to provide opportunities to bridge the two experiences.

We suggest that you meet with your interns regularly to provide feedback concerning their performance. During these meetings, the students can:

- ✦ Report on the status of a project
- ✦ Ask questions
- ✦ Learn how their work is contributing to the organization
- ✦ Participate in an evaluation of their strengths
- ✦ Discuss areas needing growth and development
- ✦ Get a sense of the work that lies ahead

At the same time you will have an opportunity to coach, counsel and reinforce positive attitudes and performance.

You should anticipate that you may have some interaction with SMCM Career Development staff through telephone calls, email, on-site visits, and written evaluations. We can help you find a solution if difficulties occur (intern attendance or punctuality problems, low motivation, unsatisfactory work, or personal conflicts). Also, you should get in touch with us if the internship conditions must be altered, such as a change in supervisors, delays in the availability of data needed by the students to complete an assignment, a strike by unionized employees, transfer or termination of an employee involved in the interns' work, or other unanticipated changes.

Encourage your interns to keep a portfolio of work accomplished during the experience. This will assist them in fulfilling their academic requirements and will provide them with a sense of accomplishment. In addition, it will give you a basis to discuss their professional growth. Specific work documents to include in a portfolio might be any of the following:

- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| ✦ Job Descriptions | ✦ Company Newsletters | ✦ Financial Reports |
| ✦ Legislation | ✦ Performance Appraisals | ✦ Displays & Exhibits |
| ✦ Proposals | ✦ Charts/Graphs | ✦ References |
| ✦ Manuals | ✦ Correspondence | ✦ Survey Reports |
| ✦ Citations & Awards | ✦ Press Releases | ✦ Cost Analyses |
| ✦ Contracts | ✦ Certificates | ✦ Computer Print-outs |
| ✦ Program Outlines | ✦ Research Report | |

In addition to spontaneous and informal meetings, you should evaluate your interns' performance at the midpoint and end of the internship, so the students know where they stand.

At the end of the internship experience you will be asked to complete our standard evaluation form, which includes places for you to provide ratings in such categories as work habits and problem solving, and also asks for you to comment on progress toward internship objectives and professional strengths and weaknesses. We strongly encourage you to discuss your evaluation with the intern before submitting it to our office, as it provides them with the feedback that is necessary to make the internship a learning experience. Though it is not required for you to do so, you may consider using the same for at the midpoint of the internship so that they can work to improve during their final weeks. **IF AT ANY TIME THE INTERN FAILS TO SHOW UP OR FULFILL THE RESPONSIBILITIES DESCRIBED IN THE LEARNING AGREEMENT, PLEASE LET US KNOW!**

TOP CONCERNS OF INTERNS

1. Give us real work!

Interns want to work and learn. An intern can help you complete a job that you would not have been able to complete without them, so it makes sense to fully utilize your interns.

2. Do what you say, and say what you do!

Be honest with your interns about what they can expect during their internship. If the job will require stuffing envelopes, then make that clear. But if you tell the intern they will be doing substantive work, but most of their time is spent doing “grunt work,” then bad feelings may develop.

3. We like feedback!

Interns are students. They may not have the business skills and experiences that you take for granted. If your intern has a problem or does something incorrectly, be sure to explain how the situation should be handled in the future.

4. We want to be included too!

Please include interns in daily life at your workplace. Allow them to attend staff meetings or project meetings and ask them to join you for lunch. If you can provide a little more feedback and perspective on the intern’s work, the product will be much better.

5. Please explain.

When you assign work, make sure you give a detailed explanation. Even if the work is trivial to you, tasks may not be obvious or easy for someone who has never done them before. Taking more time at the beginning will pay off later, when your intern can produce good work independently.

6. I want a mentor!

Make sure that interns have a supervisor to provide guidance. When interns are mentored by someone who enjoys teaching, their and the experience will be even better.

7. A minute of your time please.

Choose a supervisor who will have time to interact and communicate with the intern. As newcomers to the world of work, interns may not speak up if they’re feeling ignored or uncomfortable. The burden of making sure that internship goals and assigned projects are being met is on the supervisor. If possible, regular meetings should be scheduled.

8. Be prepared.

Some interns have arrived to start their internship only to learn that no one knew they were coming, and there is no place for them to work. Employers sometimes hire interns without considering fact that they will need a desk, chair, phone and a computer in order to do the task assigned. The most valuable internships provide interns with all of the tools to do the job.