



CREATING INTERNSHIPS OR INTERNSHIP-LIKE EXPERIENCES

What is an internship?

AN INTERNSHIP is a form of experiential learning that takes place in a workplace environment. It allows a student to integrate academic learning with practical or “hands-on” experience, to develop or refine specific skills, or to explore a career interest. Most internships are at least one quarter long.

How are internships different from jobs?

THE PRIMARY distinction is that internships have an *intentional and significant focus on student learning*. Internships often focus on defined projects, rather than routine unit operations.

What constitutes an internship?

THE EXPERIENCE must be a learning experience.

- It must not be simply to advance the operations of the employer or be the work that a regular employee would routinely perform.
- There are clearly defined learning objectives/goals related to the student’s academic and/or professional goals.
- The knowledge or skills learned must be transferable to other employment settings.
- There is intentional onboarding, ongoing supervision, and frequent feedback by an experienced supervisor who models professional and ethical behavior.

ADDITIONALLY

- The experience has a defined beginning and end, and a position description with desired qualifications.
- The resources, equipment, and facilities necessary to support the learning goals are provided by the employer.

What if our student positions don’t lend themselves well to internships?

MANAGERS of all student employees – hourly, work-study, and interns - are encouraged to infuse some internship-like qualities into student employment experiences.

- Formally or informally ask students if there are specific things they want to *learn* while employed.
- Give students substantial *projects* to complete and help them develop project management skills.
- Provide frequent and constructive *feedback* so students can improve their skills and professionalism.
- Help students *reflect* on and articulate the skills they are gaining. (see Competency resource)

How can I create a high-impact experience for student employees and interns?

- Require students to *fully engage* – to co-create the experience, be challenged, and contribute to projects important to the organization.
- Help students *build substantive relationships* – with fellow interns, coworkers, supervisors, mentors, and other networking contacts; in-person and virtually; in and beyond the immediate work team.
- Enable students to *interact with diverse ideas, people, and tasks* – challenging them to develop new ways of thinking, communicating, and problem-solving.
- Provide opportunities for *student reflection* – on what they’ve learned related to stated objectives/goals, what they still need to learn, what they value, who they are, and who they want to become.

Can I hire unpaid interns?

WHILE THERE is a Department of Labor guideline compelling for-profit employers to pay, there is not a legal requirement that public organizations pay interns. However, *offering monetary compensation helps ensure equitable access to internships* and, thus, departments are encouraged to pay interns whenever possible.

References: National Association of Colleges & Employers guidelines; George Kuh’s 2008 report on High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter; Department of Labor’s Fact Sheet #71