Internship Best Practices

An internship can be a great way for students to develop professional skills while simultaneously contributing value to your organization. If you have never had an intern before and are exploring the paid/not-paid, credit/no-credit issues, see the NACE and Department of Labor documents on the bottom of this page. If you have questions about internships, please call 919-962-6507 and ask to speak to one of our employer relations consultants, or email ucs@unc.edu [1].

University Career Services offers you easy access to UNC-Chapel Hill student interns. Internships can be:

- Any time of the year (summer, fall, spring semesters)
- Any length of time (a month to a year)
- Full-time or part-time
- Paid or non-paid
- For credit or non-credit

*adapted from the University of Southern California’s career center.

FAQ:

What Internships Should Provide

An internship should offer students with:

- Practical work experience or a project, given by a designated supervisor
- An opportunity to observe, contribute, and rotate through the different parts of the department/organization
- Career connections, mentorship, and networking opportunities within the organization/industry
- Training, either formal, on-the-job, or virtual/remote along with constructive, ongoing feedback for personal and professional development

Typical Internship Program Characteristics
Length

- Completed during an academic semester or summer; at least six weeks minimum duration

Hours

- Paid 8-15 hours/week during the fall, spring, or summer semesters (for students taking a full-time course load)
- Paid 8-15 hours/week during the fall, spring, or summer semesters (for students enrolled taking a department-based internship-credit course)
- Paid 40 hours/week internships may be offered during the summer for students not taking a full-time course load (whether the internship is credit-bearing or not)

Compensation

- Pay a competitive wage \( \$ \)/hour based on experience and industry/field. Contact our External Relations Consultants to discuss this if you have questions. ([ucs@unc.edu](mailto:ucs@unc.edu) [1])

Suggested Structure/Framework for an Internship Program

Goal Setting

- Assess the organizational needs and determine what you hope to gain from an internship program
- Define the aspects to make an internship an educational, interesting, and rewarding experience
- Develop individual expectations, goals, and learning objectives for the intern
- Communicate program goals with your team to ensure the organization’s commitment

Initial Preparation

- Draft a job description that clearly explains the duties required of the intern
- Review the organization’s ability to provide assignments, equipment, and compensation
- Build a pipeline of student candidates to potentially convert to full-time employees
- Invest time in interns through selection, training, supervision, and evaluation
- Identify a staff member who would enjoy and benefit from mentoring an intern, who is committed to and capable of providing structure and insight in addition to constructive feedback
Discuss upcoming intern projects and activities in addition to the time commitment during an internship.

Orient the intern to your organization; acquaint the intern to the mission, vision, and policies of your company (un/written and un/spoken) along with team introductions. Set specific professional and career goals for the internship. Teach the intern about the working world and consider serving as a mentor. Explain the organizational structure and illustrate the company culture. Schedule a formal meeting to discuss progress and expectations for your projects. Provide other colleagues with background information about the intern’s projects, responsibilities, and schedule. Discuss projects regularly and expected outcomes (decide on start and end dates, in advance). Schedule a mid-semester evaluation and an exit interview to provide a forum for constructive feedback and questions.

University Career Services expects our employers to abide by our Non-Discrimination Policy and Anti-Harassment Guidelines when interacting with UNC-Chapel Hill students before, during, and after their internship experiences.

**General Resources**

The following resources are provided by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE):

- 15 Best Practices for Internship Programs
- Key Items to Document for Your Internship Program
- Recruiting Methods That Do, Don’t Work
- Toolkits Provide Key Information to Interns, Managers

**Virtual Resources**

When establishing a virtual internship, consider these suggestions.

- Learn how to convert your internship program into a remote option
- Develop meaningful learning objectives
- Identify ways to best design and manage remote internship programs
- Develop a virtual onboarding program