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 [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


General Resources

The following resources are provided by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) [4]:

- Key Items to Document for Your Internship Program [6]
- Toolkits Provide Key Information to Interns, Managers [8]

Virtual Resources

When establishing a virtual internship, consider these GitLab [9] and Forefront [10] suggestions.

• Learn how to convert your internship program into a remote option [11]
• Develop meaningful learning objectives [12]
• Identify ways to best design and manage remote internship programs [13]
• Develop a virtual onboarding program [14]