

Developing Internship Programs

Steps and Best Practices

Step 1: Set goals and policies

Step 2: Write a plan

Step 3: Recruit a qualified intern

Step 4: Manage the intern

Step 5: Conduct exit interviews and follow-up

STEP 1: SET GOALS AND POLICIES

Before hiring an intern, it is imperative to give careful thought to the internship or internship program. Start by answering the following questions:

What is the main goal for the internship or program?

Organizations hire interns for a myriad of reasons. Using the reasoning behind creating the internship itself may speak to activities, ongoing work and/or projects that interns will work on. For example, goals and policies will be different for small organizations than for large ones – one may want help, while the other wishes to create a talent-pipeline with the university. Consider these carefully!

Who will supervise and mentor the intern?

Mentorship and supervision are crucial to optimize experiences for interns and program success. Before establishing an internship or program, consider who these key employees will be and how they will manage including this new responsibility into their workday.

How will the intern be compensated?

Internships may be paid or unpaid. Determine ahead of time if you will be able to compensate your intern and how/how much. Career Services can help navigate Department of Labor standards on whether an intern must be paid and provide additional information on typical compensation.

How long will the internship last?

Internships have predetermined beginning and end dates. Most commonly these align to the academic calendar. Determine the time line and plan out various activities or milestones within these dates to ensure interns have a thorough understandings of your expectations.

STEP 2: WRITE A PLAN

Developing an internship program takes careful planning and discussion. Coming to a consensus on program goals that are understood by all involved is critical. Formalizing an internship or internship program with written goals, expectations, and outcomes pro-actively addresses the concerns and needs of management, staff, and students.

Carefully write out the internship program with a plan and goals. Internship goal completion should be measured by the organization. Structuring the internship ahead of time provides tangible goals and objectives that will enable providing proof to organization decision-makers regarding the importance and value of a well-developed internship program.

In creating the plan, include specific ideas, proposals and logistical information. The questions that follow may assist in formulating a plan:

- What are the tasks and objectives of the project or activities?
- Is the internship based on learning about all parts of the organization or focused on completing a single project?
- What are the deadlines?
- How often/what hours will the intern work?
- Where will the intern work?
- How will the intern be trained?
- Will the intern be cross-trained?
- What sort of academic background and experience should the intern possess?
- Who will have primary responsibility for hiring and supervising the intern?
- Who will mentor the intern?
- What after-work activities will be included?

STEP 3: RECRUIT AN INTERN

The following are intended to help employers create a program that serves students in the best way possible, and to help employers hire interns that are a good fit for their organization:

- I. Conduct a Needs Assessment
- II. Draft an Internship Job Description
- III. Recruit Your Intern
- IV. Learn About Legal Issues
- V. Evaluate Your Intern

Conduct a Needs Assessment

Every organization should consider their needs when developing an internship program. Employers should ensure there is enough "real" work for interns to do. Good reasons to consider building an internship program:

- Are you a small business looking for help on a special project?
- Are you a growing organization that needs to find well-rounded, motivated employees?
- Are you a nonprofit that has low administrative costs, but that could provide an excellent experience for a student?

Internship programs can be designed to meet organizational needs and expectations while meeting intern goals. **The number one requirement for success is employer commitment.** Commitment means creating a space, establishing a supervisor for interns, and identifying a mentor for the student - someone who enjoys training and has the time to commit to the intern.

Draft an Internship Position Description

After determining what is needed from an intern it is time to create a description similar to a job description. It is important to include required and preferred qualifications, such as the following:

Descriptions *Should* Include...

- Brief description of the organization
- Knowledge, skills, and abilities
- Preferred class level, major, and/or background
- Required GPA or course prerequisites
- If the internship is paid/unpaid and the wage
- Internship plan outline, including duration and expected hours

Descriptions *May* Include...

- If international students are welcome to apply
- What documents and procedures are required for the application process
- Benefits and incentives included
- Connection to coursework or agenda for training and/or education

Recruit Your Intern

Once you have finalized your internship description, it is time to find a qualified student! Begin by posting the opportunity to Handshake, the UNC online database where students and alumni look for internships and jobs.

Begin recruiting the semester before you need an intern. This will give you time to write the description, post it, receive applications, set up and conduct interviews, and hire an intern.

To learn more about Handshake, visit careers.unc.edu/resources/handshake. Handshake provides:

- An easy to use, intuitive interface, with a clean, modern, and simple design -- making it easy to navigate and use
- Powerful search tools that offer the ability to pinpoint and build candidate pools easily
- Built-in communication tools that allow messaging students directly
- Added data points that allow employers to send communication to the right students at the right time in their academic careers

In addition to using Handshake to post your position, you can use the Career Services office to conduct interviews and work with employer relations coordinators to set up events to recruit. When asked, employers with established programs emphasized developing a personal connection and getting face time with students is a great recruitment tool. Let students know how their strengths and abilities can fit in with your organization.

Another way to create brand awareness and develop a connection with students is to attend the Career Services Career Fairs. Every year UCS Career Fairs attract hundreds of students looking for shadowing, internship, and job opportunities. More information can be found the Career Services website: careers.unc.edu/employers/.

In addition to Career Fairs, Career Services plans professional development opportunities for students. Volunteering at these various events is another way to connect with students. If you are interested in learning more about these opportunities or have questions about the Career Fairs, please visit careers.unc.edu/employers/.

STEP 4: MANAGE THE INTERN

Set Interns Up For Success!

The beginning days of an internship are often its defining days. When interns are given their first tasks, they are being signaled what can be expected in the future. If they are given nothing or very little to do, it sends a message that this job will be easy — and boring. Interns don't want that, and of course, neither do employers. The organization of an internship program will likely be the single most important influence on an intern's impression of their employer, and thus the chances that he or she will come back or choose to work with them post-graduation.

The sooner interns understand what an organization does and how it operates, the sooner they can assume assigned responsibilities and become productive. Some things to consider doing during a student's internship experience:

- Work with the intern to create objectives or SMART goals, helping to set expectations and give points for future feedback
- Take interns on a tour of the facilities and introduce them to other employees
- Give interns company materials to read such as newsletters, annual reports, organization charts, or memos from the CEO
- Encourage interns to spend breaks and lunches in places where employees gather
- Schedule regular one-on-one meetings or “check-ins” to give and receive feedback
- Give interns opportunities to observe or participate in professional meetings
- Allow and encourage interns to interview company personnel
- Encourage interns to walk around and observe others at work

Review your program goals. The nature of the program and the activities should directly relate to your these goals and will assist you in creating and maintaining a structured meaningful internship experience.

Monitor Intern Progress!

Supervise: Interns need a designated supervisor for their internship term. Intern supervisors use all the skills necessary in any effective supervisory relationship: leadership, motivation, delegation, communication, development, training, and evaluation.

Mentor: Students need a mentor who will assist their transition from the classroom to the work environment. Since the internship is an extension of the learning process, having a mentor provides opportunities to bridge the two experiences.

Meet: Meeting with interns regularly provides an opportunity to receive as well as provide feedback. During these meetings, students can report on the status of projects, ask questions, learn how work contributes to the organization, participate in an evaluation of their strengths, discuss areas needing growth/development, and get a sense of what kind of work lies ahead.

Evaluate: Take time to give constructive feedback to interns. Evaluation provides an opportunity to coach, counsel, and reinforce positive attitudes and performance.

Encourage: Help interns keep a portfolio of work accomplished during the experience. This helps fulfill students' academic requirements and provides a sense of accomplishment. In addition, it gives a basis to discuss intern professional growth.

MONITORING ADJUSTMENT AND UNDERSTANDING

Supervise
Mentor
Meet
Evaluate
Encourage

Specific work documents to include in a portfolio might be any of the following:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| • Job Description | • Charts/Graphs | • Press Releases |
| • Company Newsletters | • References | • Cost Analyses |
| • Financial Reports | • Manuals | • Contracts |
| • Performance Appraisals | • Correspondence | • Certificates |
| • Displays and Exhibits | • Survey Reports | • Program Outlines |
| • Proposals | • Citations and Awards | • Research Reports |

Evaluating Intern Progress

Review organization goals as well as intern goals/requirements on a regular basis. In the beginning of an internship, more frequent meetings may be helpful to both employer and intern. Evaluation processes may differ and may be formal or informal depending on organization culture and structure. There are similarities that both interns and internship supervisors have in the evaluation process:

- Review the internship position description and ensure goals are being met
- Review objectives and/or goals set by the intern and revisit any that have changed or which need adjustment to ensure completion during the experience
- Review tasks and assignments and clarify expectations
- Determine if additional assistance or training is needed to help the intern be successful
- Ask the intern to evaluate their experience and accept feedback on concerns and successes
- Regular written evaluations are helpful if your organization would like to consider hiring interns
- Written evaluations by both intern and employer can also provide the opportunity to publicize the success of your internship program to management and to potential interns.

Evaluating the Internship and/or Internship Program

Maintaining program popularity requires hard evidence that the organization is getting a return on its investment. Some organizations have adopted a process of formal exit interviews. This process can determine if interns have positive experiences, and provides valuable feedback to managers for program planning in future.

In addition to qualitative measures, a number of quantitative measures may be adopted. Some common measures include the number of interns that become full-time employees, repeat requests for interns from managers, and growing numbers of intern applicants. Tracking these types of qualitative data can be made easier utilizing the Handshake system. In order to successfully measure program outcome, return to the stated program goals, and address those outcomes.

Keeping a Focus on the Future

With the need for skilled and qualified employees, it makes sense to investigate quality students interested in internships during their educational careers. The decision to take on interns gives a competitive advantage in recruiting the best, most talented employees. Internships today mean notoriety to employees most sought after in the future. Hiring interns means employees are pre-trained for an organization's workplace and have loyalty to the company.

Statistically, hiring interns has proven to lower training time, reduce recruiting costs and significantly lower turnover rates. Quality programs build a reputation that pays off with students, colleges, and the community. Organizations save money while benefiting from the input of talented, enthusiastic and innovative people.

With all of these advantages, you might find that you can't afford not to do internships.

STEP 5: CONDUCT EXIT INTERVIEWS & FOLLOW UP

As internships wind down and the workload and tasks lessen, the last few weeks are crucial for organizations to take action and conduct exit interviews. Exit interviews are a great resource for revealing strong insights into a company it would not be able to uncover otherwise.

Decide what type of interview to conduct. One might be a face-to-face interview, if time permits. However, exit interviews can also be offered in the form of a worksheet or template the intern can fill out on their own time. Both options collect important feedback for the company.

To make the most of an exit interview, organizations should make sure to ask critical questions, such as the following:

- How would you describe our company culture?
- If you could make a change to your internship/internship program, what would you change? What, if anything, about the company as a whole?
- How did the job match your expectations? How did it help you achieve your goals?
- What do you believe is the next step in your profession, and how can we help you get there?

Outside of the exit interview, it is important to make time for a proper “goodbye”. The interview and an opportunity to tie up loose ends not only gives insight, but allows everyone involved to leave with good feelings about the experience.

Ensuring a Quality Internship Program

The experience must provide for applying the knowledge gained in the classroom. It must not be simply to advance the operations of the employer or be the work that a regular employee would routinely perform.

The skills or knowledge learned must be transferable to other employment settings.

The experience has a defined beginning and end, and a job description with desired qualifications.

There are clearly defined learning objectives related to the student’s professional goals.

There is supervision by a professional with expertise and educational and/or professional background in the field of the experience.

There is routine feedback by the experienced supervisor.

There are resources, equipment, and facilities provided by the host employer that support learning objectives/goals.