

Internship Basics



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Internships Defined

An internship is a position which allows a student to gain professional experience in an occupational area they are considering. Typically the experience has a level of responsibility that allows a student to develop new skills in the field and offers the student training and supervision that facilitates learning. Internships can either be for credit or completed without documentation by the University.

Benefits of Having Internships

Internships are a critical part of your educational experience and provide countless benefits. Some critical reasons to have one or more internships:

- Gain excellent on-the-job experience to help you build your skills and resume
- Develop great networking opportunities with employers
- Learn about an organization to determine if you would like to work there after graduation
- Narrow your career interests and focus your job target
- Gain leads for full-time jobs. Employers consistently rank their organization's internship program as one of the most effective tools for recruiting college graduates for full-time positions

Some thoughts from alumni on the benefit of internships:

"An internship will open your eyes to the career and you will know in a very short time whether that career is right for you."

"Internships or any job experience related to your major is extremely valuable. Start doing internships and job searching early."

"Outstanding work in your internship leads to great references and experiences and ultimately you will be very appealing to employers."

Frequently Asked Questions

When is the best time to do an internship?

This varies by major and by the type of internship you plan to secure. Some technical internships (and those for credit) may require greater academic knowledge better suited to a Junior or Senior. Other fields can accommodate students in the Sophomore year. Start early! Those students with 2-3 internship experiences are often the most productive in securing full-time employment quickly upon graduation. If you do not feel ready for an internship, consider a part-time job in your field instead.

Are internships required to graduate?

In some majors, internships are taken for credit and are a requirement for the program. In this case, an internship must meet specific guidelines and requires faculty/deaprtment approval. However, many students participate in additional internships for professional development and to gain a variety of experiences before graduation. If you are in a major where an internship is required, the College of Business Internship Coordinator can help you learn the requirements for the internship and the steps required to gain credit for the experience.

How many hours per week are required for a typical internship?

Internships occurring during the academic year typically require a commitment of 20 hours a week per 3 credit internship. During the summer it is more common for an internship to be full-time. We encourage a minimum of 20 hours per week to allow for a comprehensive learning experience. To receive credit for an internship, there are a minimum number of hours you must accumulate. Check with the Internship Coordinator for specific information for your major.

Are internships paid?

Some internships are paid, while others are not. Internships with larger for-profit organizations are often paid and in some cases students are paid quite well. Students having internships with small businesses or small non-profits may find compensation much more difficult to secure. In some cases you may receive a one time or monthly stipend for your work.

Basic Steps to Securing an Internship

Step 1: Clarify Your Goals

Having some focus before you start your search will actually make your internship search easier and lead to a better experience. Before you begin looking, ask yourself the following questions:

- What type of internship are you looking to acquire?
- What skills would you most like to develop during the experience?
- What type of work environment would fit your interests and values? (For profit? Non-profit? Government? Large? Small?)
- What qualities do you look for in an ideal supervisor?

Use this information to thoughtfully and critically assess various internship opportunities. Need help clarifying your goals? Talk to your faculty/department advisor or get help form the College of Business Internship Coordinator.

Step 2: Resume, Cover Letter, and Application Materials

Before you begin looking for internship openings, it is important to prepare the appropriate documents that employers may require in the application process. Be sure to do the following:

- Draft a resume and cover letter; resources are available at the College of Business Internship Programs Office
- Have your materials critiqued by the Ferris State University Career Center staff to ensure you have marketed your skills as effectively as possible. Contact CLACS@ferris.edu for an appointment

Step 3: Identify Internship Openings

Finding and securing an internship takes discipline and dedication on the part of the job seeker. A few basic steps you should take when searching for an internship:

Postings/Events

- Check out the “Resources for Finding an Internship” document found in the Internship Programs Office
- Attend fall and spring semester career and internship fairs
- Visit the Ferris State University Center for Leadership Activities and Career Services Office to utilize **HANDSHAKE**, the official resource for job and internship postings on campus.

Unadvertised Openings

- Not all internships are advertised. Make a list of organizations you want to work for and contact them directly to inquire about internship programs
- Tell your family, friends, and acquaintances that you are looking for an internship and what type. This will often lead to information about openings
- Talk to faculty and instructors about your internship goals. They often have information on upcoming openings within organizations
- Approximately 75% of job opening are never advertised. Conducting an informational interview can lead to internship opportunities
- Propose an internship with an organization that does not currently have an intern program
- Not finding the right internship experience? Schedule an appointment with the Internship Programs Office by calling 231-591-3049
- Detailed information on job searching, cold calling and informational interviews is available at the College of Business Internship Programs Office in BUS 324

Internships Abroad

Studying abroad is a great opportunity to develop cultural understanding and language skills that will help you in your future career. Many study abroad locations also have internship opportunities available for students. This can be a great opportunity to experience a culture in a new way and can also allow for tremendous professional development in your field.

Step 4: Accept or Reject Internship Offers

Being offered an internship is very exciting and it may be tempting to say “yes” to an employer immediately. Before accepting any offer, be sure to follow the below tips and suggestions:

- Know who will supervise you; be sure you have met them and feel as if you can work well together
- Confirm your daily tasks while on the internship; be certain the skills and experiences you hope to gain can be developed in this experience
- Clarify hours, schedules, pay and make sure they will work around your class schedule
- If you are waiting to hear from another organization, ask for extra time to think about the first offer. Call the second organization, explain the situation, and ask if their decision will be made soon
- Ask for any offer in writing so the terms that have been agreed upon by all parties are documented. If they do not send you a written offer, send them a letter reviewing your understanding of the position, supervisor, schedule, dates of employment and pay arrangements
- If you reject an offer, be sure to be cordial and thank the employer for their time and consideration
- If you are not offered a position that you interviewed for, contact the organization to thank them for the opportunity to interview and ask for feedback on your resume, experiences, qualifications, and interview technique

Credit, Paid vs. Unpaid Internships

Credit

Some majors require that you obtain credit for an internship as part of your degree requirements, and for others it is optional. We highly suggest students to have multiple internships for better self-exploration and career preparation. Always check with your academic adviser to confirm the guidelines for your individual major. The process for gaining credit for internships varies for each college. To learn how to gain credit for your internship experience, check with your college Internship Programs Office.

Unpaid Internships

Some unpaid internships provide professional experiences that are priceless. We encourage students to consider every internship, even if it is unpaid. The short-term financial sacrifice can pay off heavily in the long run by getting outstanding experience and excellent networking contacts.

Ferris State University's College of Business Internship Programs Office recommends that all organizations review the U.S. Department of Labor's Fair Labor Standards Act on Internship Programs.

Unpaid internships will not violate the U.S. Department of Labor's Fair Labor Standards Act if it is a training program which meets the following criteria:

1. The internship, even though it includes actual operation of the facilities of the employer, is similar to training which would be given in an educational environment;

2. The internship experience is for the benefit of the intern;
 3. The intern does not displace regular employees, but works under close supervision of existing staff;
 4. The employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern; and on occasion its operations may actually be impeded;
 5. The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship; and
 6. The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages for the time spent in the internship.
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Prepare For Your Internship

Develop Thoughtful Learning Objectives

The most common problem in an internship stems from conflicting expectations among the student, the site supervisor, and/or the faculty advisor. Defining learning objectives and goals will provide you with a sense of direction and can be a great tool for dialog with your supervisor. A minimum of four learning objectives are required for credit bearing internships.

Think about creating learning objectives related to:

1. Academic Concepts – Consider writing objectives that relate to classroom learning or reading
2. Skill Development – Identify skills you would like to learn or improve during your internship. Talk with faculty and your internship supervisor for ideas. Review your resume for missing skills sets
3. Personal Development – Create goals that develop you personally including your character, preferences, communication skills, self-confidence, and other personal skills

Have Realistic Expectations

It is important that students have realistic expectations about their internship experience. One frequent misconception that students have when entering their internships is that they will be given a lot of responsibility immediately. Typically, you will have to earn the supervisor's trust before being given higher level tasks. It is also wrong to assume that you will receive a permanent job offer as a result of your internship. While this does happen, it is important not to make that assumption.

Succeeding in Your Internship

Having a successful internship doesn't happen automatically. There are several basic things that you can do to make your internship a successful learning experience and to increase your likelihood of turning the experience into a job offer after graduation.

Basics

- Always arrive on time and don't request too much time off unless there is genuine need
- Dress professionally and ask your supervisor for specific guidelines to follow
- Don't become involved in workplace gossip
- Stay on task with projects; if you finish a task, ask for another
- Alert your supervisor if you encounter a problem or have made a mistake

Communication

- Have an initial meeting with your supervisor to discuss your interactions, how often will you meet, how they feel about interruptions and who you should contact if your supervisor is unavailable
- When you need assistance, ask. Supervisors expect interns to have questions
- Set a list of goals for the internship and confirm with your supervisor they are reasonable
- Request regular meetings with your supervisor to discuss your progress on your goals and to request feedback on your performance
- When finishing your internship, ask for a final meeting with your supervisor to get feedback and to discuss using them as a reference in the future
- Develop your interpersonal skills: recognize when to speak and when to listen

Learning

- Ask to conduct informational interviews with other employees to learn about other positions and departments
 - Remember to ask not just "how" questions. Also ask: "Why?" or "How does this piece connect with the entire project?" "What will happen with this when I am finished?" "What is the next phase?"
 - Observe personal styles of supervisors and colleagues: identify leadership styles that promote good working relationships or hinder productivity
 - Learn about the site's mission statement or philosophy: is it "lived" or is it forgotten?
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Concluding Your Internship

There are several things you can do to be sure that your internship ends on a positive note:

- Thank people you worked with for the opportunity to intern with their company
- Sit down with your supervisor for an "exit interview." Discuss how you met your original learning objectives. Talk about the projects that were most valuable to you and what skills you gained. Ask your supervisor for any advice s/he may have regarding future job searches or job performance
- Request a letter of recommendation if you have established a positive relationship with your supervisor
- Ask permission to copy appropriate items to include in a portfolio
- Create a list of all the projects you worked on and the skills you developed. Make a list of additional skills you would like to develop in the future
- Revise your resume to incorporate your internship and the skills you have developed

Additional Questions?

For more information regarding internships, feel free to contact us at the College of Business Internship Programs Office in BUS 324, by phone at 231-591-3049, or via email at COBinterns@ferris.edu