

How to Conduct a Successful Internship Experience

The Ohio State University at Newark and
Central Ohio Technical College

Office of Career Development & Experiential Learning Services



Introduction

The Ohio State University at Newark and Central Ohio Technical College recognize the importance of experiential learning opportunities for both the educational advancement of students and the growth of host employers' businesses and organizations. This handbook offers a comprehensive outline on how to conduct a successful internship experience.

What is an Internship?

Internships are work-related learning experiences that provide students with the chance to gain important knowledge and skills in a career related that may or may not be directly related to their academic study. Internships should have clearly defined learning objectives related to the professional goals of the student's academic coursework. An internship provides exposure to career fields of interest without making a permanent commitment.

Criteria for an Experience to be Defined as an Internship

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) has established instructive criteria for an experience to be defined as an internship. To ensure that an experience is educational, and thus eligible to be considered a legitimate internship by the NACE definition, all the following criteria must be met:

1. The experience must be an extension of the classroom: a learning experience that provides 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.
2. The skills or knowledge learned must be transferable to other employment settings.
3. The experience has a defined beginning and end, and a job description with desired qualifications.
4. There are clearly defined learning objectives/goals related to the professional goals of the student's academic coursework.
5. There is supervision by a professional with expertise and educational and/or professional background in the field of the experience.
6. There is routine feedback by the experienced supervisor.
7. There are resources, equipment, and facilities provided by the host employer that support learning objectives/goals.

If these criteria are followed, it is the opinion of NACE that the experience can be considered a legitimate internship.

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Position Statement on U.S. Internships, July 2011.

Tips for Success

Maximize the Experience

Experiential learning opportunities, including internships are a key opportunity to explore career possibilities, gain hands-on experience and meet "people in the field." *What you get out of an internship depends, at least in part, on what you put into it.*

Here are some tips on how to maximize your internship experience:

- **Show initiative.** When volunteers are called upon to perform a task, raise your hand. Show interest and enthusiasm for learning new material. Or, if you learn about a project you would like to take on – do not wait for someone to put out a call for volunteers. Go ahead and ask if you can work on it. Step out of your “comfort zone” - volunteer for projects that will be challenging so you can gauge if you have the aptitude to develop skills in those areas.
- **Be Professional.** Let your supervisor and others know you take your role seriously. Your dress, timeliness and preparation will all impact your success in the internship.
- **Do not be afraid to say, "I don't know how."** While employees are usually hired on the basis of their skills, most supervisors assume that interns need more training. View the experience as a chance to obtain training and enhance your skills. Also, encourage your supervisor to point out your weaknesses, and accept criticism with interest not defensiveness. This is an opportunity for you to train yourself to learn from others.
- **Be creative.** Employers view interns as a “breath of fresh air.” You can help them by suggesting solutions to their problems. They want to hear ideas, but do not expect them to jump on every suggestion.
- **Form relationships.** Internships give you the opportunity to meet other interns and employees. Take advantage of being on the “inside” of an organization. Arrange informational interviews with staff in other departments of interest to you. The more individuals you can meet within the organization, the better your prospects of making contact with someone who can assist when you are looking for full-time employment.
- **Be adventurous.** Try something new; investigate a career area you have never considered. You may find a career path that is more to your liking! One method for doing this is to shadow employees working in the organization’s various divisions/departments. (You will need to first get the approval from your supervisor and/or instructor before taking this step.)

Common Employer Expectations

When an employer hires an intern, they expect professional conduct and behavior. This is true whether the internship is paid or unpaid and whether you are receiving course credit or not. Interns need to remember that they are being evaluated at all times. Here are some general rules of conduct to remember:

- Pay attention to the rules, procedures and expectations given to you in orientation and training. If you are given an employee or intern handbook, read it and keep it with you for reference.
- Be prepared to work the agreed upon number of hours. Arrive on time and do not leave early without permission.
- If you are going to be absent or late, notify your supervisor as soon as possible. Even if you have left a message, continue to contact the company until you can speak to someone directly about your situation.
- If you are uncertain about the dress code ask your supervisor.
- Pay careful attention to all forms of communication. Answer emails with full sentences and proofread messages before they are sent. Use professional language when speaking on the phone.
- Be careful when interacting with the full-time employees, especially if they are acting inappropriately. Often, interns will need to maintain a higher degree of professional conduct than some of the full-time employees that they work with.
- Avoid office gossip and inappropriate relationships with coworkers.
- Treat everyone in the organization with respect including administrative support staff, building and maintenance staff and fellow interns.
- Be professional when attending off-site company activities (e.g., retreats, conferences and company social activities).

Promoting Yourself for Future Employment

- Be recognized as a star performer
- Work hard to make a good impression at all times, with the goal being to demonstrate your potential for full-time positions.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions – it will demonstrate an interest in learning as well as help you to improve your performance.
- Demonstrate a positive attitude.
- Make the most of every task you are given. Even small assignments will be noticed if there are done with rigor and attention to detail.
- Learn from the experienced employees you work with and accept constructive advice.

- Ask for a letter of reference before leaving the internship, while your performance is still fresh in your supervisor's mind.

Learn About the Employer

- During breaks, lunch, or slow times ask co-workers about their jobs. Find out what they do on a day-to-day basis and what they like/dislike.
- Try to get a sense for what the staff look for when evaluating candidates for full-time openings. You may pick up valuable information that you can use in a cover letter or interview should you apply in the future to that company or similar organization.
- Get to know top decision-makers – they can provide valuable insight as to why and how things are done.
- Ask to attend meetings (e.g., regular staff meetings, division meetings) as this is a good strategy for learning about the company's organizational culture.

Build Your Network

- Collect business cards – you will need them when looking for a full-time job.
- Always send thank you e-mails/notes to those who help you in some way. Write a thank you note to your supervisor when you are finished with the internship.
- Keep in touch with your co-workers and supervisor after leaving the site.

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Making Meaning of Your Internship Experience

Prepping for Careers

Interning is job hunting, new millennium style. Studies show that about half of new hires have internship experiences. Businesses compete for capable, bright people who learn quickly. Many interns do such impressive work that after graduation, their employers invite them back.

So popular is an internship as an entree into the working world that one third of college students have one or more internships on their resumes. Newly recognized as hot toeholds in the job market everywhere, internships permit students to sample career fields, taste the realities of working life, and develop the soft skills needed in the workplace.

Why Interning is Popular

The reason college students join the interns' parade is clear: Students fear being slapped upside their career after graduation by an unfriendly and competitive job market. A college degree by itself no longer commands a quality job. It's a new fact of life: A good internship lays the foundation for a good resume. Employers jump on the internship bandwagon to avoid expensive hiring mistakes or to bolster staffs made anemic by downsizing actions.

How can an internship launch your career?

Here are a few examples of the benefits internships bring.

- **Internships allow you to gain marketable experience in your area of study.** In the classroom you read about it; in an internship you do it. Learning how to apply your education in a working environment is the objective of any internship.
- **Internships Identify Potential Career Paths.** By observing the workings of an organization from the inside, you can discover titles of specific positions that interest you, determine the best educational route necessary and employ steps to reach those positions.
- **Internships Test Career Options.** Suppose you're majoring in civil engineering, but you a hunch you might like genetics more. An internship allows you to test your hunch in a genetics laboratory. Nothing beats a preview of a career field before making a long-time commitment.
- **Internships Enhance Resumes.** Internships always add muscle to a resume. They demonstrate to potential employers that you have focus, commitment, and practical experience to quickly and productively launch yourself into a job. Internships also show you understand enough about your career objectives and the current job climate to have foreseen the need for this experience and were resourceful enough to get it.
- **Internships Promote Contacts.** Meeting people who have the power to assist your career progress, known as "networking," may occur in any internship. The people you contact during an internship can boost your knowledge of the career field, and give you good references and job leads in the future.

- **Internships Boost Job Offers After Graduation.** A study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that 35 percent of the 624 companies surveyed view interns as their first choice for new full-time employees. Companies always appreciate an intern who has a working knowledge of their organization prior to arrival.
- **Internships Ease Transition from School to Real World.** For many graduates, the shift from college student to college grad is a bumpy ride. The days of not having to show up in the outside world until your first class, jumping out of bed five minutes before class, throwing on some sweats, and trudging off for a two-minute commute to class are history. Learning the ropes of the post-college world, what employers expect you to contribute and how you are expected to perform on the job makes transitioning easier.
- **Internships Help Develop Transferable Skills.** In the business revolution upending our world, the number one career issue is skills. Focus on accumulating transferable skills that cross career fields and office functions. In an internship, you acquire skills that give you something besides your education to transfer to a full-time job.
- **Internships allow you to Improve Social I.Q. Skills.** Surviving in the working world involves more than just book knowledge and an intimate understanding of word processors. Lessons in life also involve social skills, including teamwork, conversing with co-workers, and knowing when to stay quiet and when to speak up. Do you have any idea how to handle conflict resolution when your knowledge of a subject is more current than your supervisor's? Do you know what to do when a clueless co-worker becomes unreasonable? Internships can give you a head start in learning day-to-day social skills on the job.

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Documenting Your Experiences

Updating Your Resume

It is important that you keep your resume updated and current; you never know when someone may ask you to send them a copy. Every job and/or experience you have had should be referenced on your resume and internships are no different. Write down the opportunities and tasks you were entrusted with while they are still fresh in your mind. Employers often look for internship experience in their prospective employees, so making sure your internship opportunities are included on your resume could help secure you a job!

Develop a Portfolio

A portfolio is a marketing tool you can develop to use in your job search. Items that might be included in your portfolio include copies/summaries of completed projects, positive performance reviews/supervisor feedback, and letters of recommendation. Your portfolio can accompany you on future interviews and may be referenced as you talk about the projects and experiences you had as an intern.

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Prepare for Interviews

Employers base their hiring decisions on the belief that *past behavior and performance predicts future behavior and performance*. Conducting an internship will provide you with substantive examples of your knowledge, skills and abilities and their application in a professional setting. Be prepared to share with an employer about your internship experiences in an articulate manner.

Policies, Guidelines and Responsibilities

Students conducting an internship or other experiential learning experience for academic credit should confer with their academic or faculty advisor to ensure they meet the policies, guidelines and accompanying responsibilities established for that course. Viewed broadly, students must be in good academic standing as determined by their institution and/or program of study and not be in violation of the institution's Student Code of Conduct. During the experience the student is viewed as an agent of the College/University and should adhere to all policies and guidelines established by the appropriate academic unit and institution.

Role of College/University

Students conducting an internship or other experiential learning experience should avail themselves to the assistance provided by the College/University to construct a successful experience. For those experiences conducted for academic credit, the student should seek the assistance of his/her academic department. In all other instances, students should contact the Office of Career Development and Experiential Learning Services.

Conclusion

The benefits of internship or other experiential learning experience are immense. The transferable skills you acquire along with the professional relationships you create are resources that will come in handy time and again. Once you graduate, you will have to face a competitive job market and your internship may just set you apart from the crowd. It is proved over and over again, internships, and the hard work dedicated to them, pay off! If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Career Development & Experiential Learning Services at the address, phone number or e-mail address listed below.

Office of Career Development & Experiential Learning Services
Warner 226, 1179 University Drive, Newark, OH 43055
740.366.9453, thatcher.42@osu.edu, or dthatche@cotc.edu

Appendix A: Definitions

Clinical Experience: Supervised course work within which the student has the opportunity to engage in clinical activities similar to those performed by a departmentally approved professional. Departmental policies and accreditation criteria often define the experience. Site supervisors are often held to specific credentials as a component of such.

Co-op: Cooperative education is a unique form of education that differs from summer employment and internships. The National Commission for Cooperative Education (NCCE) explained the development of a co-op model “that incorporates a cooperative education as a structured educational strategy integrating classroom studies with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student’s academic or career goals. It provides progressive experiences in integrating theory and practice. Co-op is a partnership among students, educational institutions and employers, with specified responsibilities for each party”.

Experiential learning: Experiential learning, at its core is operationalized by engaging students in learning through sequential exposure to challenging, compelling, and enriching activities conducted in appropriate settings. It integrates development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and fosters application of methods of critical inquiry. It engages students in personal reflection in order to organize, interpret, and bring meaning and coherence to their learning experience.

Internship: Internships are work-related learning experiences that provide students with the chance to gain important knowledge and skills in a career related that may or may not be directly related to their academic study. An internship provides exposure to career fields of interest without making a permanent commitment.

Internship Host Site: The organization, business, or entity that offers an organized hands-on experience for a student intern. The Host will define the Site Supervisor, provide or assist with the creation of a position description, determine pay for the experience, and define the duration of the experience.

Site Supervisor: The individual designated to provide direct supervision to the intern while s/he is at the Internship Host Site.

Supervision: A tutorial and mentoring form of instruction in which a supervisor monitors the student's activities in practicum, field work, and internship and facilitates the learning and skill development experiences associated with practicum, field work, and internship. The supervisor monitors and evaluates the clinical work of the student while monitoring the quality of services offered. (From the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP] Standards.)

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