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Employer's Guide to Developing an Internship

Many businesses, non-profit organizations, and government institutions know that WWU student interns are a *dynamic and cost-effective resource*. In fact, many employers have found them to be so successful that they have built internships into their long-term operations and staffing plans.

This guide will help organizations who are *new to internships as well as those employers who wish to improve their existing internship programs*. Topics include:

1. What is an Internship?
 2. What Can an Intern Do for Your Organization?
 3. What Students Look for in an Internship
 4. Basic Support Needed for an Intern
 5. Recruiting an Intern
 - Writing the Job Description
 - Advertising the Position
 6. The Learning Contract
 7. Evaluating the Intern
 8. Other Helpful Tips
- Appendix: Sample Learning Contract

1. WHAT IS AN INTERNSHIP?

Internships are *designed by the employer to meet organizational needs while at the same time providing for the needs of the intern*. Interns make a short-term, time-limited commitment to gain professional experience in their field of interest. The employer in turn, commits to providing a learning experience and specific work assignments related to a student's studies and/or career interests. Depending on the situation, internships may be

- *highly structured* or, alternatively, they *may be quite flexible*
- *part-time* or *full-time*, *paid* or *unpaid*.
- *vary in length from one quarter to one year*.
- *taken for academic credit (or not)* depending on a student's major. Many students prefer not to take the credit and focus on professional development during the internship.

Employers are not required to approach an academic department prior to developing an internship. In most cases, *it is the responsibility of the student to identify a faculty advisor to work with during the internship*. The student, faculty advisor and employer work cooperatively to identify realistic learning goals for the internship. The employer may be asked to provide a written evaluation at the end of the internship.

2. WHAT CAN AN INTERN DO FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Western Washington University interns may:

- Assist on *special projects*
- Provide additional help during *peak business periods*
- Offer fresh, creative perspectives and energy
- Contribute research techniques, computer skills, and current theoretical knowledge
- Provide an organization with an opportunity to *try out a possible new employee* for a future job opening

Special Projects. Most employers have a “wish list” of projects that need to be done but have limited staff to organize and implement them. Students, because of the nature of their academic schedules, often seek internship opportunities of limited duration (generally 2-3 months). Thus, employers find interns to be an ideal solution for their “wish list.”

For example, interns can be assigned to organize research projects, plan special events, or develop special promotional campaigns. When developing an internship involving special projects, **you should identify goals, timelines, and outcomes so that everyone understands the purpose and expectations involved.**

On-Going Operations. Some organizations experience **peak periods where additional staff are needed.** Others operate under limited budgets and need additional staff throughout the year. Interns may be able to alleviate some of these challenges. For example, interns may be assigned to serve as facilitators for youth groups, human resource management support staff, public relations assistants, or marketing associates.

3. WHAT STUDENTS LOOK FOR IN AN INTERNSHIP

In order to *attract top quality interns*, savvy employers understand the benefits to the student and structure internships in such a way that the experience benefits both the student and the employer. Students seek internships that allow them to:

- Gain **professional work experience**
- Receive professional **mentoring**
- Establish a **professional network**
- Make their academic studies more relevant

Remember, students are looking for internships that provide them with **pre-professional experience with an opportunity to learn.** Therefore, it is not a good idea to assign an intern to a position which is strictly clerical. As with any job, there may be some clerical duties involved, however, they should not be the only duties.

Finally, many students have to work part-time in order to pay for their education. A paid internship will always attract more applicants.

4. BASIC SUPPORT NEEDED FOR AN INTERN

Determine How Much Time It Will Take to Get the Job Done. Once you determine what the intern will do, decide how much time it will take to accomplish the goals. Generally, students look for internships that last 2-3 months, coinciding with the academic quarter. Some students stay longer at internships which they find fulfilling. If you feel an intern needs to commit to a longer period bear in mind that you may be limiting your candidate pool.

Part-time or full-time? Some internships are set up on a part-time basis (10-20 hours per week), allowing students to intern while taking classes. Other students intern during the summer when they have the greatest amount of free time. Occasionally, students take time off from classes during quarters other than summer in order to intern full-time.

How Much Will it Cost? Hiring an intern is a cost-effective strategy for meeting immediate and long-term personnel needs. Some interns work without pay and those that are compensated are paid modest wages, a monthly stipend, or whatever an organization can afford and feels is equitable. Generally, interns do not receive employee health or retirement benefits.

Identify Necessary Office Support Needed. A crucial and occasionally overlooked step in developing internships involves identifying the office support needed for a successful internship. To get the most out of an internship, the employer should consider the following:

- Who will supervise the intern?
- Will the intern work in one department or several?
- What kind of orientation and training will the intern need?

- Where will the intern's work area be located?
- Will the intern have access to equipment and tools to accomplish the tasks (e.g., telephone, fax, computer, etc.)?
- What hours will the intern work?
- What will be the intern's daily routine be?

5. RECRUITING AN INTERN

Write the Job Description. Once you identify the basics, you can write a job description. You'll use this description to **recruit and hire the intern**. Employers also find this useful to **inform staff** about the intern and to **establish clear expectations** about the internship. It is a good idea to include the following in a description:

- A brief organizational description
- Position title
- Skills & qualifications required or preferred
- Duties and responsibilities
- Pay rate (if any) or other compensation. Other benefits
- Students will be interested to know about the professional value of the internship. For example: networking, learning opportunities, special experience/skills to be gained
- Hours per week
- Start/end dates of the internship
- Details and deadlines about the application process

Advertise the Position. The Career Services Center can provide you with assistance in recruiting the right student for your internship. To be successful, you should consider using **more than one of the following** resources:

- **Online Listing.** List your internships free on WWU Career Services Center's database, [Viking CareerLink https://www-csm.symphlicity.com/employers/index.php](https://www-csm.symphlicity.com/employers/index.php). Current students, alumni, faculty and staff have free access to your listings.
- **Contacts in departments.** Students often seek information about internships from their academic departments. The Career Services Center can help connect you with appropriate contacts on campus.
- **Classified advertising in the student newspaper.** The [Western Front](http://westernfrontonline.net/advertise) is widely read, distributed free on campus twice a week and the cost of advertising is reasonable. For more information check <http://westernfrontonline.net/advertise> or call them at (360) 650-3160.
- **Flyers.** The Career Services Center will **distribute flyers** to departments and other places where students seek information about internships. For more information, contact the Recruitment Coordinator at (360) 650-2944.
- **Internship & Career Fairs.** The Career Services Center hosts general and special interest career and internship fairs each year. A booth at one or more of these events is a great way to meet a large numbers of students seeking internships. For more information contact the Employer Outreach Manager at (360) 650-3240 or visit our [events page](http://www.careers.wvu.edu/careerfair_specialevents.shtml) at http://www.careers.wvu.edu/careerfair_specialevents.shtml.

6. The Learning Contract

An intern who is earning academic credit may be required to develop a learning contract. It resembles a job description, but its purpose is to formally identify the responsibilities and expectations of both the intern and supervisor. Although your input is important, *you do not have to take the lead role in developing the contract. It is the student's responsibility to work with the appropriate faculty to develop the document.* A sample learning contract can be found at the end of this *Guide*.

Your contribution to the contract might include a job description, information about supervision and evaluation or

input into learning activities. **We strongly recommend that all interns and their sponsors develop a learning contract**, regardless of whether or not they are earning academic credit for the internship. A sample contract is attached to this guide. In general, a contract should include:

- **General Data.** This section should include names, addresses, phone numbers and position titles for the supervisor, student and faculty sponsor, if one is utilized.
- **Job Description.** Describe the role and responsibilities of the intern. List duties, projects to be completed, deadlines, etc., if relevant.
- **Supervision.** Describe the supervision to be provided. Detail the kind of instruction, consultation, etc., the student will receive and from whom.
- **Evaluation.** How will the student's performance be evaluated? By whom? When and how often?
- **Learning Objectives.** What is the student expected to learn through this experience? Be specific. Try to use concrete, measurable terms.
- **Learning Activities.** Describe activities that will help the student meet his/her learning objectives. Include projects, research, report writing, etc.. List readings, writings, contacts with faculty sponsor, field trips, observations, etc., and relate these activities to the learning objectives.
- **Agreement.** Include a statement that the contract may be terminated or amended by the student, faculty sponsor, or internship supervisor at any time upon written notice, receipt and agreement by the other two parties. All parties should sign and date the document.

7. Evaluating the Intern

This is an important process for all parties involved. A student performing a full-time, ten week internship may be evaluated at the following intervals:

1. The first evaluation should be done soon after the intern's starting date, usually at the end of the first week. The purpose of this meeting is to make sure everyone's initial expectations are being met.
2. The second evaluation should come about mid-way through the internship. This is a good chance to assess progress made towards assigned goals and determine what resources are necessary to complete assignments.
3. A final evaluation should occur during the last week of the intern's commitment. This gives the employer the opportunity to measure the intern's impact on the organization and determine if the company's needs were met. The intern can also reflect on the experience and assess how he/she has benefited.
4. Successful interns will appreciate a thoughtful, well-written letter of reference that they can use in future job searches.

8. OTHER HELPFUL TIPS

- If you are unable to offer remuneration, consider offering other benefits such as free services or products, enrollment into workshops or conferences, gift certificates, etc.
- If you are a community-based agency focused on education, environment, human needs or public safety, your intern may qualify for [Students in Service/Americorps](http://www.studentsinservice.org/) education awards. Refer them to <http://www.studentsinservice.org/> for information.
- Include interns in your staff meetings, retreats, and social events.
- Be sure to clarify the intern's work schedule. It helps if you can be flexible during exam weeks.
- Offer to write a letter of recommendation at the end of the internship.
- If you can't hire the student once the internship is completed, offer advice and mentorship regarding networking and job search strategies in your professional field.
- Solicit the student's advice on how you might improve the internship in the future.
- Ask the intern to help recruit a replacement — word of mouth is a very successful recruitment tool!

Appendix: SAMPLE LEARNING CONTRACT

- A. JOB DESCRIPTION:** Describe in as much detail as possible your role and responsibilities while on your internship. List duties, projects to be completed, deadlines, etc., if relevant.
Acting as legislative aide, I understand that I will be responsible for doing background research on legislative issues under consideration in the State Legislature. This research will involve library work, telephone inquiries, and field visits to constituent agencies and organizations. I will write background papers on my findings by deadlines to be determined by my supervisor. I will provide general assistance in the office - to be determined by my supervisor. I will provide clerical assistance in the office--telephone answering, reception, messenger service--on an occasional basis, as needed. I will work 40 hours per week and overtime as needed.
- B. SUPERVISION:** Describe in as much detail as possible the supervision to be provided. What kind of instruction, assistance, consultation, etc., you will receive and from whom, etc.
I will meet weekly with my supervisor to monitor the progress of my research and learn about the use of the State Library from other research staff in the office. I will visit the district office. Jean Marat, Office Manager will give me a general orientation and assist me as needed in performing general office tasks.
- C. EVALUATION:** How will your work performance be evaluated? By whom? When?
My work will be evaluated by my supervisor and myself in a final consultation session. We will use a standard state employee evaluation form as well.
- D. LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** What do you intend to learn through this experience? Be specific. Try to use concrete, measurable terms. I will be able to:
- (1) describe how public policy is developed and enacted in the state legislature.*
 - (2) understand the roll and activities of a state legislator.*
 - (3) examine and develop an in-depth understanding of the involvement of racial minorities in the development of at least two major pieces of social policy legislation in the state and the consequences as a result of its enactment or lack of enactment in the legislature.*
 - (4) develop and practice legislative research and report writing.*
 - (5) improve communication skills - writing, conversing, etc.*
- E. LEARNING ACTIVITIES:**
- (1) **On-the Job:** Describe how your internship activities will enable you to meet your learning objectives. Include projects, research, report writing, conversations, etc., which you will do while working, relating them to what you intend to learn.
By writing in State Representative George Danton's office, consulting with my supervisor and co-workers, by following legislation from initiation to enactment, by researching its need and impact, by visiting constituents, by writing reports, by having to communicate clearly by telephone, memo, etc., I will be able to attain my learning objectives.
- (2) **Off-the Job:** List reading, writing, contact with faculty sponsor, peer group, discussion, field trips, observations, etc., you will make and carry out which will help you meet your learning objectives.
At the conclusion of my internship, I will write two papers. One will be a self-evaluation of my progress made toward meeting learning objectives. The other will be a term paper (10-15 pages) following the legislative history of a major social policy issue in this year's legislative session and focusing on the involvement of Hispanic Americans in its development and enactment and its probable impact on their lives.
- F. EVALUATION:** How will you know what you have learned, or that you have achieved your learning objectives? How do you wish to evaluate your learning objectives? Who will evaluate? When? How will a grade be determined? By whom? When?
Evaluation of my progress made toward my learning objective through this internship will be done in the following ways: Objectives 1,2,3, and 5 through my term paper, my self-evaluation report, and through conversations with my faculty sponsor. Objective 4 by feedback from my internship supervisor and faculty advisor on reports that I write on my legislative research. My grade will be determined by my faculty sponsor who will take into account my self-evaluation and evaluation of my internship supervisor of my work performance.

G. AGREEMENT

This contract may be terminated or amended by student, faculty sponsor or internship supervisor at any time upon written notice, which is received and agreed to by the other two parties.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Faculty Sponsor: _____ Date: _____

Internship Supervisor: _____ Date: _____

Copies of this contract will be distributed to all parties.