



Career Services Center

A unit of Academic and Career Development Services
516 High Street | Old Main 280
Bellingham, WA 98225
www.wvu.edu/careers
360.650.4621

Employer Guide to Internships

Many businesses, non-profit organizations, and government institutions know that internships offer a terrific opportunity for both organizations and students. This guide will help organizations who are new to internships as well as those employers who wish to improve their existing internship programs.

What is an internship?

An internship is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Internships give students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths and give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent.¹

What does this mean? An internship is a legitimate learning experience a student engages in at an organization – not simply an operational need that is fulfilled by a student.

Interns make limited-term commitments to gain experience in an area of interest at an organization. In turn, the organization commits to providing a learning experience, specific work assignments and relevant oversight and mentoring. Interns may:

- Assist on special projects (events, promotions, research projects)
- Provide additional support during peak business periods (development of skills and professionalism in support at high demand times)
- Offer fresh perspectives and creativity (work on a particular problem or issue with a team or supervisor)
- Contribute research, computer skills and current theories to an organization (develop programs, training, resources or data in conjunction with a team or supervisor)

How can we develop an internship or program?

It is important to determine what opportunities exist in your organization that may offer an opportunity for an internship. If you are able to identify a project or operational need that offers an educational opportunity for a student, you will need to develop a description.

Important elements of an internship:

- **Skills and tasks:** what the student will do and how it offers opportunities for learning and development
- **Support:** It is crucial that an intern has a supervisor/mentor with the skills and time to assist them in successfully completing their tasks
Consider who will supervise the intern, what kind of training they will need, where they will be located and what equipment or technology will be required and what other resources will help them be successful
- **Time frame:** how much time is needed to accomplish the task or goals (most internships are one quarter to one year in duration)
- **Commitment:** part-time or full-time (this is usually dependent upon whether the student will be

attending classes or will be on summer break or taking time away from classes)

- **Pay:** Paid or unpaid (see section below on pay guidelines)
- **Credit:** Internships may be for credit or not, depending upon the student and their major or department

What students look for:

- Opportunities to gain professional work experience in their field or area of interest
- Establish a professional network within a community, organization or industry
- Apply their academic studies to practical problems and opportunities
- Develop a portfolio illustrating work they have completed outside of the classroom
- Positions that align with their limitations in terms of geography, time and finances

How do we recruit an intern?

After going through the steps above, you should have a thorough description of the internship opportunity. At this point you will want to summarize it into a description, much like a job description. This is what will be posted and promoted to students. An internship description should include, at minimum:

- Name and brief description of your organization
- Title of the position, for example, “Public Relations Intern”
- Duties and responsibilities
It is helpful to include learning opportunities, for example, “will have the opportunity to meet with and present to clients” or “will develop press releases for use in a portfolio”
- Skills and qualifications required or preferred
- Pay rate
- Hours per week
- Start and end dates
- Instructions and deadline for applying

The Career Services Center is here to assist you in recruiting students for your internship. We treat internships the same as post-graduate positions in terms of services and promotion. All employers are encouraged to:



1. **Post on Viking CareerLink**, our career database where we direct students to search for internships and jobs.
2. **Create flyers** or other materials that we can distribute to relevant departments, faculty and student clubs.
3. **Advertise in the student newspaper**, the Western Front.
4. **Recruit on campus** via an information table, session or attendance at an internship or career fair.

What do we pay an intern?

Internships may be offered as paid or unpaid. We strongly encourage organizations to offer paid internships. Paid internships receive more applications, are more likely to attract top students and result in greater commitment from the student and the employer to the internship’s success.

Interns in non-profits may be unpaid under the US Department of Labor’s guidelines. In a for-profit organization, there are six criteria that must be met in order for an internship to be unpaid:ⁱⁱ

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.

It is up to the employer to make this determination and establish pay rates accordingly. More information can be found at: <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm>.

What are the expectations during and after an internship?

The expectations during and after an internship vary depending upon the specific opportunity and the student. If it is being taken for academic credit, a learning contract may be required. This will include the basic information about the internship as well as specific description of learning opportunities, supervision and evaluation. Employers may be required to participate in final projects, letters of evaluation or other activities in order for the student to gain credit.

Regardless of a learning contract, it is important and valuable to evaluate an intern at your organization. This may be done informally by periodically meeting with the intern and having a final meeting to discuss their performance. You may also wish to provide more formal evaluations at the midpoint and conclusion of an internship. Students will appreciate a thoughtful letter of recommendation if you are pleased with their work at the conclusion of their internship.

Clear, open and consistent communication is critical to an intern's success, as well as to ensuring your organization has a positive experience. Additionally, including interns in staff meetings, projects and memos is a good way to ensure they make the most of their time and learn about your organization and culture.

Who can I call?

If you think you are interested or ready to explore internships at Western Washington University, please don't hesitate to contact us with questions, to discuss your needs or to learn more about our students.

WWU Career Services Center
360.650.4621
careers@wwu.edu

ⁱ National Association of Colleges & Employers (NACE). *Position Statement: US Internships*. <http://www.nacweb.org/advocacy/position-statements/united-states-internships.aspx>. September 10, 2014.

ⁱⁱ US Department of Labor (DOL), Wage and Hour Division (WHD). *Fact Sheet #71: Internship Programs Under the Fair Labor Standards Act*. <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm>. September 10, 2014.