



## Developing Your Own Internship

### Career Development Center

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There are different ways to find a great internship experience. Many organizations have well-established and structured internship programs with specific application deadlines. Others may have various internships available as the need arises. However, it may be that you can't find an internship opening that interests you or that you qualify for. In this case, you can **research and develop your own position**. It takes time and effort, but an internship that is specifically tailored to your own academic and career goals can be a wonderful experience.

#### What is an internship?

- An on-site work experience that is related to your career goal, or a field of interest
- Duration is agreed upon ahead of time and is usually short-term (typically a summer, quarter, or academic year)
- Emphasis is on learning and professional development, which should involve the guidance of a mentor
- Can be paid or unpaid, and involve part-time or full-time hours
- May provide you with academic credit

#### What are the advantages of interning?

- Gain valuable work experience and a competitive edge for your job search or grad school applications – also looks great on the resume
- Helps you develop professional and marketable skills in a real workplace
- Lets you “test drive” a chosen field so you can get a feel for the type of work and the workplace culture
- Allows you to use theories studied in class in a practical learning environment
- Enables you to network, secure letters of recommendation, and connect to an employer who may offer you full-time work in the future

### BASIC STRATEGY FOR FINDING AN INTERNSHIP

- I. Determine what you want to do.
- II. Determine where you want to do it.
- III. Make the contact and offer a proposal.

#### I. Determine what you want to do

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you research internship types

- Why do I want an internship? (to develop certain skills, to explore this particular career, to determine if this field is the right field for me?)
- What do I hope to learn? What experiences do I hope to gain?
- What types of experiences would I like to have as an intern?
- What kind of daily duties would I like to be involved in?

The answers to these questions can help you narrow the focus of your internship search.

## II. Determine where you want to do it

Do your research

- Speak to your professors: they are experts in their field and can often provide you with suggestions and contacts.
- Join campus clubs and professional organizations, as they may provide you with the opportunity to meet professionals in the field. Attend workshops, conferences and read the organization's journal and newsletters.
- Interview professionals in your field of interest (this is called informational interviewing\*) – their advice may help you find an internship opportunity
- Use online resources (organization websites, job search sites) as well as newspapers, journals, the Yellow Pages, and business directories.
- Talk to your family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances – they should be part of your network, and they may have some suggestions for you.

## III. Make the contact and proposal

Once you have determined an internship location, make the contact directly (via a phone call, email or letter) and ASK for an internship. The employer may not be advertising until later, or their internship positions may be currently filled, OR they may not have considered using an intern but your inquiry may plant the idea in their minds!

### The Proposal

Based on the information you gathered during your research, prepare a proposal for the work you would like to do as an intern. Don't be afraid – you are offering them a highly valuable commodity – yourself. At the same time, realize that they may not be interested – perhaps for no other reason than the lack of staff to supervise and mentor you. Don't let this discourage you – just review your proposal (make it compelling) and keep searching until the right opportunity presents itself.

**What are you proposing?** The proposal could be for a specific project that you know from your research that the organization needs done, or it could be for a particular type of work that the employer is likely to have. Most employers are too busy to deal with students who say they will “do anything,” so be specific as to what you would like to do and what you have to offer.

**What to include:** There is no prescribed format, but it may include the following:

- A clear description of what it is you are offering to do for the organization, and why you think they will benefit from it
- Specifics on what you want to work on or the type of position you would like to fill
- Reasons why the employer would not be sorry if they took you on
- Your dates of availability, your preference for full-time or part-time hours, and your stance on whether this be a paid or unpaid position
- Your resume, which should aptly illustrate your experience, strengths and skills

### Then What?

Follow up your initial phone call, email or letter within a week. Students sometimes feel it's pushy to make such a call, or that they are bothering the employer, but realize that a polite follow-up is expected and reinforces your interest and commitment. The working world understands the need for persistence.

**GOOD LUCK** on your search and, once employed, perform well on the job. This could lead to meaningful full-time work in the future!