

Guide to Psychology Undergraduate Student Internships

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1) What are student internships?

Students in the Department of Psychology have the opportunity to get an internship placement with a community organization to gain hands-on experience related to psychology. Cal State LA has many community partners that students can be connected with in order to complete an internship for one or more semesters.

Psychology-related internships capture a wide range of settings and responsibilities because psychology is such an expansive field! Psychology-related internships may fall under any of the categories below:

- **Clinical / Counseling:** Mental health centers; counseling centers; substance use centers
- **Health / Rehabilitation:** Medical centers; healthcare; rehabilitation centers; organizations working with physical or developmental disabilities
- **Developmental:** Primary or secondary educational settings; childcare or child development centers; afterschool programs; tutoring; nursing homes or retirement centers; organizations providing services for the elderly
- **Behavioral and Cognitive:** Cognitive assessment centers; speech and language services; working with animals (e.g., animal shelters); autism service agencies; school districts
- **Forensic:** Legal settings; organizations working with systems-involved individuals (e.g., child welfare, incarcerated individuals)
- **Social / Community:** Organizations meeting community needs (e.g., food pantry, housing support, resource distribution); community advocacy or social justice organizations

2) Can I get course credit or payment for completing for an internship?

Students have three options for receiving course credit while completing an internship. All internships for course credit must be with one of Cal State LA's community partners. **Options A and B** provide students with flexibility to choose a wide range of internship options and do not include a weekly class (see “#4 How Do I Find an Internship?” for link to approved organizations). **Option C** is for students interested in gaining clinical experience at one of a few agencies and includes a weekly class.

A) (If completing UNPAID internship of your choice) PSY 3950: Field Experience in Psychology

Students can enroll in PSY 3950 for course credit for unpaid / volunteer internships.

Students can enroll in 1 unit for every 3 hours / week completed at the internship. Students can complete a maximum of 6 units of PSY 3950.

B) (If completing PAID internship / job of your choice) PSY 3980: Cooperative Education

Students can enroll in PSY 3980 for course credit for paid internships / jobs. Cal State LA will not pay you to complete these internships, but if you are working for an organization that pays you, you may enroll in this course for credit.

Students can enroll in 1 unit for every 10 hours / week completed at the internship. Students can complete a maximum of 6 units of PSY 3980.

C) (If completing UNPAID structured clinical internship – must apply and attend class) PSY 4850: Directed Field Experience in Community Clinical Psychology

Students can apply to enroll in PSY 4850, through which students complete a yearlong unpaid, structured clinical internship at a community agency and attend a weekly class. Internship options are pre-determined and take place at a select number of organizations (e.g., service agencies, mental health agencies, etc.).

For more information, email Dr. Eisen at meisen@exchange.calstatela.edu .

For Options A and B, students must submit the following items by 4:00pm on the Tuesday of Finals Week:

- 1) **One-page paper** describing and reflecting on your field experience and how it related to psychology. Your paper must be psychology-related or you will receive NO CREDIT (NC).
- 2) **Timesheet or log** – Totaled and signed by supervisor (You can pick up a timesheet from the Psychology Office or you can create your own). Hours must be complete or you will receive NO CREDIT (NC).
- 3) A **business card** from your work location or supervisor
- 4) PSY 3980 ONLY: **Proof of employment** (e.g., payroll stub)

3) Can I count internships towards my major requirements?

PSY 4850 counts as a *Group II: Social / Community* elective. Students can substitute a maximum of 3 units of PSY 3950 AND a maximum of 3 units of PSY 3980 to fulfill major requirements. Internships may be used to fulfill the upper-division core requirement for *Group VI: Applied Psychology / Community Engagement* (3 units required) and may be substituted to fulfill upper-division elective requirements. For example, if students still need to fulfill a Group I, II, III, or IV requirement, they can email the Department to ask to substitute their 3950 / 3980 units for this requirement.

4) How do I find an internship?

Internships **MUST** be pre-approved and contracted with Cal State LA. Students may view a list of approved internship sites on the Psychology website internship / community service page.

Once you have found some internship options and are ready to contact them, see the “Guide to Professionally Contacting Internship Sites” section below for tips on how to draft your email, resume, and cover letter.

5) What if I want to do an internship at an organization that isn't already a community partner with Cal State LA?

Students must go through a university process to get the organization approved and contracted by Cal State LA. Please note that this process takes a full semester, so students must initiate the process at the start of the semester prior to the semester they want to enroll in PSY 3950 or PSY 3980. For example, if you would like to receive credit for Spring 2027, you must initiate this process no later than the start of Fall 2026.

To initiate this process, email the Psychology Department for information at psych@calstatela.edu.

6) What do I do once I have secured an internship?

To enroll in PSY 3950 or PSY 3980, students must:

- 1) Visit the Psychology Department office or website to fill out a **PSY 3950 / PSY 3980 Permit Slip**
- 2) Purchase University-required **SAFECLIP insurance** (\$5)

How to purchase SAFECLIP insurance:

1. Log into the My Cal State LA Portal
 2. Click the **GET** tab
 3. Navigate to **Student Center**
 4. Select **Make a Payment**
 5. Choose **Student Liability Insurance**
 6. Select **SAFECLIP – Student Academic Field Experience for Credit Liability Insurance Program**
- 3) After completing the purchase of SAFECLIP insurance, email your payment confirmation receipt to the Department as proof of coverage, at psych@calstatela.edu.

Guide to Professionally Contacting Internship Sites

(Adapted from Cal State LA Department of Public Health)

General Application Guidelines:

- It is highly recommended that you **apply to at least 2-3** internship sites. However, please only submit applications to sites where you would genuinely like to intern.
- Treat each internship application as if you are **applying to a professional job**. If you want your application to be successful, your first impression needs to be good.
- Most sites require you to email the Site/Field Supervisor directly with your **resume and cover letter** (but each site will have their own specific application instructions)
- **Be patient** once you have submitted your application. Be understanding of other people's schedules, timelines, and circumstances. Most organizations do not follow the academic calendar! **Wait at least 5 business days** before following up to ask if they have received your application. But if enough time has lapsed, be proactive and follow up on the status of your application.
- You may be offered a spot at several different internship sites (yay!). If that's the case, make your decision and then **make sure that you email all the internship opportunities that you are not taking** – let them know that you have decided to go with a different organization that more closely aligns with your interests and thank them for considering you as an intern. Do **not** ignore anyone or fail to give a definite answer one way or another to the people with whom you have been corresponding (that's a sure way to burn bridges). And do this all in a timely manner, so that sites you decline have time to make offers to other students.

Emails to Organizations:

- Please start your email with **proper greetings** (e.g., Dear Ms. Lavine, Good morning Mr. O'Connell, etc.) and end your email with your **full name, affiliation** (i.e., Cal State LA Department of Psychology), and **contact information**.
- Please include in the **subject line** what your email is about (e.g., Application for Spring 2026 Internship – Cal State LA).
- Include 1-2 sentences about **why you are interested** in volunteering with the organization.
- Attach your **resume and cover letter** (see below for details).
- Please **proofread and spellcheck** your email content thoroughly **before** hitting the "Send" button. Once your email is sent, it cannot be undone.
- See below for sample email.

Sample Email:

Dear Ms. Lavine,

My name is John Doe, and I am currently an undergraduate student majoring in Psychology at Cal State LA. I am writing to explore possible options for volunteering or interning with your organization. I was excited to learn about your organization because I would like to work with children in the future, and I believe getting to work in an after-school program like yours will give

me experience and skills to help my future career. Attached is my resume and cover letter. I look forward to hearing from you soon and discussing next steps.

Sincerely,

John Doe
Cal State LA Department of Psychology

Resume:

- Check out the following **resources** to get some ideas and/or assistance on how to prepare a good resume:
 - <https://www.calstatela.edu/careercenter/resumes-cover-letters>
 - <https://www.themuse.com/advice/how-to-make-a-resume-examples>
 - <https://www.themuse.com/advice/the-41-best-resume-templates-ever>
- Please **proofread and spellcheck** your resume and make sure that all information is **accurate and up-to-date**.
- If possible, **save your resume as a PDF file** before attaching it to your email.

Cover Letter:

- Please start your cover letter with **proper salutations** (e.g., Dear Ms. Lavine, Good morning Mr. O'Connell, etc.).
- Please explain in your cover letter **why you are applying to the specific organization** and **why you believe you are a good fit as their intern**. Each letter should be **tailored** to the specific internship opportunity to which you are applying.
- Please **proofread and spellcheck** your cover letter and make sure that all information correctly matches the organization to whom you are writing. The last thing you need is to realize you copied and pasted content from a different letter and forgot to change the important details.
- If possible, **save your cover letter as a PDF file** before attaching it to your email.
- Check out the following **resources** to get some ideas on or assistance with writing a good cover letter (but **do NOT plagiarize** this content!):
 - <https://www.calstatela.edu/careercenter/resumes-cover-letters>
 - <https://www.themuse.com/advice/the-perfect-cover-letter-template-to-show-off-your-skills>
 - <https://www.themuse.com/advice/the-perfect-cover-letter-template-to-show-off-your-skills>
- **If due to health, work, family or other reasons you have a specific preference in terms of the internship modality** (e.g., you can only participate in a fully online/remote internship and nothing in-person), **it is recommended that you state that clearly in your cover letter**. Do not assume that what you want or hope to get is what the internship site can offer you.