Internship Program

Service Learning Program
Civic Engagement Program
Undergraduate Research Program

Internship Program

Employer Handbook

Transforming Careers

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www.msudenver.edu/internship
**WHAT IS AN INTERNSHIP?**

**Characteristics Include:**

- An important element that distinguishes an internship from a short-term job or volunteer work is that an intentional “learning agenda” is structured into the experience.
- An effort is made to establish a reasonable balance between the intern’s learning goals and the specific work an organization needs to have done.
- An internship is part of an educational program, and may include monitoring and evaluation by a faculty supervisor.
- May be part-time or full-time.
- May be paid or unpaid. (See the chart below and reference the Legal Issues section to help you determine what is best for your organization.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAID INTERNSHIPS</th>
<th>UNPAID INTERNSHIPS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May be taken for credit or just for pay: CREDIT OPTIONAL</td>
<td>Must be taken for academic credit: CREDIT REQUIRED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workers Compensation provided by employer</td>
<td>Workers Compensation provided by university</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tracked by university internship coordinator</td>
<td>Tracked by faculty supervisor and university internship coordinator</td>
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<td>Begin and end at any time: TIMING FLEXIBLE</td>
<td>Lines up with semester dates: TIMING DETERMINED BY SEMESTER</td>
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<td>Students may stay longer in their positions and be trained to do more advanced work</td>
<td>Students may stay in their positions only as long as they continue to receive credit</td>
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<td>Paid interns are less likely to have competing job demands and can often work more hours</td>
<td>Unpaid interns are only able to work hours appropriate to their credit requirements</td>
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<td>Performance evaluation required and site visit may take place</td>
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**How Do Internships Benefit Employers?**

- Highly motivated pre-professionals bring new energy and perspective to your organization
- Visibility of your organization is increased on campus
- Opportunity to get those “extra” projects done that your staff just never has time to do
- Flexible, cost-effective work force not requiring a long-term employer commitment
- Proven, cost-effective way to recruit and evaluate potential employees
- Opportunity to provide feedback to the university to shape the training of future professionals
**Step 1: Set Expectations and Write a Plan**

What do you hope to achieve from the program? Draft a position description that clearly explains the duties of the intern.

**Questions to consider:**
- **Will you pay the intern?**
  While your organization may not be in a position to pay much, carefully consider whether you can offer a paid opportunity. Remember that students have expenses, including tuition for credit-bearing internships, and even a small wage can make a big difference in recruitment and retention.
- **Where will you put the intern?**
  Do you have adequate workspace for them? Computer, phone, e-mail address? Is free parking available?
- **What qualifications do you want in an intern?**
  Establish expectations for skill requirements but keep your expectations realistic. Students want to learn and be challenged, but they are new to their fields and are seeking internships to enhance their skills.
- **Who will have primary responsibility for the intern?**
  You will need someone in charge of guiding and evaluating the intern. This person should be selected because he or she likes to teach or train and has the resources to do it.
- **What will the intern do?**
  Be as specific as possible. Interns, like others in the process of learning, need structure so they don’t become lost, confused or bored.

**Step 2: Recruit an Intern**

Posting an internship with MSU Denver’s Internship Program is easy. Access the online submission form at: [http://www.msudenver.edu/internship/employers/internshipproposalform/](http://www.msudenver.edu/internship/employers/internshipproposalform/) Once a submission is received, we make it available to students through our online internship database, **TIP (The Internship Program) Online**.

Timing is everything! When possible we recommend posting positions in consideration of the semester schedule:
- Spring Semester Dates: Mid-January to early May
- Summer Semester Dates: Mid-May to early August
- Fall Semester Dates: Mid-August to early December

We find that most employers are successful posting 1-3 months before the semester begins.

**Step 3: Hire an Intern**

Remember to choose your interns carefully. After all, they might be permanent employees some day. You’re making an investment; time and money will go into this person. We strongly encourage a
face-to-face interview. It is a chance to determine if the intern will fit into your organization and if you have mutually compatible goals for the internship.

An intern provides an opportunity to bring diversity to your organization, so consider the benefits of potential differences in perspective from the rest of your staff.

**Step 4: Manage the Internship Experience**

- **Orient your intern to his or her new workplace.**
  Introduce him or her to co-workers and provide a tour. Cover organizational structure, safety regulations, security or confidentiality policies, and acceptable dress and appearance standards.

- **Give your intern the resources and structure he or she needs to do the work.**
  Develop challenging work assignments and provide opportunities for increasing responsibility. Design a list of work activities and potential projects to guide the student workflow.

- **Be available to your intern.**
  Remain accessible to answer questions and provide guidance.

- **Provide lots of feedback to your intern.**
  Make sure to address both positive observations as well as recommendations for improvement. Include assessment of learning objectives and goals in your meetings and make sure to monitor the successful completion of tasks.

- **Weekly meetings.**
  We recommend setting aside a little time every week to touch base with your intern to make sure they are on track and have a chance to ask questions.

**Step 5: Evaluate the Intern**

- **Host a site visit.**
  Your intern’s coordinator or faculty advisor may contact you to schedule a site visit to discuss the student’s progress. Generally this is a 30-60 minute meeting, which includes the student, to share the intern’s accomplishments, discuss any concerns, and give feedback to the university.

- **Complete an evaluation.**
  Toward the end of the semester you will receive an electronic evaluation. Timely completion of the evaluation is important to ensure that faculty advisors have the information necessary to grade the student. We encourage you to go over your comments and ratings with the student.

**WHAT HAPPENS IF . . .**

**The Student is Seeking Academic Credit?**

*Unpaid interns* are required to receive academic credit because that allows us to cover the student for Worker’s Compensation and Liability. This is our way of protecting you and the student. *Paid interns* are not required to seek academic credit, but many students may need the credit to apply toward their degree. Some employers will make the decision to require their paid interns to get credit even if the school doesn’t. We will support that policy.
When students are seeking academic credit they must follow the process outlined below:

1. **Application for Credit Paperwork.**
   Upon accepting an internship, students need to connect with their internship coordinator who will initiate the Application for Academic Credit form. This form is a learning agreement that ensure that the employer, student and academic department are on the same page about what the student will be doing and how much credit he or she will get. The site supervisor’s role is to document what the student will be doing and what kind of training he or she will receive.

2. **Approval Process and Course Registration.**
   Once everyone has signed off, the internship coordinator will help the student register for the academic credit. You will be sent a copy of the final Application for Academic Credit form. Unpaid interns should not start their internship until the student is registered.

3. **Evaluation.**
   As a site supervisor you do not have the responsibility to assign your intern’s grade. But you may be asked to host a site visit to discuss the student’s performance and you will be asked to complete an end-of-semester evaluation form.

**Issues Arise with your Intern?**

Although uncommon, performance and/or professionalism issues may arise with your intern. When a situation arises, address your concerns immediately and directly with the intern. If you are unable to reach agreement, or if the student is unresponsive to correction, please involve the student’s internship coordinator or faculty advisor before termination occurs. Appropriate handling of performance issues can be a beneficial learning experience for students.

**The Internship Location is Virtual or in a Home Office?**

Ideally, internships allow students to gain experience in a physical work environment where they interact on a regular basis with their supervisor and other employees. This helps them learn interpersonal work skills, organizational culture, and workplace professionalism. The workplace is changing, however, and learning to function in a non-traditional environment can also be an excellent experience. In those instances, we require home-based or virtual employers to hold their initial meetings with applicants in a public setting, to maintain a business atmosphere, to schedule regular face-to-face meetings, and to establish a system for ongoing communication.

**The Intern is an International Student?**

International students often have an F-1 visa that requires them to receive credit for an internship and restricts them from working more than 20 hours per week when school is in session. Students must consult with their international advisor before accepting an internship.
Do You Have to Pay Interns?

Paid interns make ideal workers - hungry to learn, eager to make a good impression, and willing to perform a multitude of tasks. The relatively small amount of money employers spend on intern wages and benefits is a good investment. If pay is not possible, unpaid internships must comply with the U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). This legislation applies to all companies that have at least two employees directly engaged in interstate commerce and annual sales of at least $500,000.00 and provides guidance for the legal use of unpaid interns, or trainees.

There has been a series of recent court actions related to unpaid internships. Employers who need to comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act and are planning to offer an unpaid internship, should check with their own legal counsel to ensure they are managing unpaid internships appropriately.

The FLSA does not limit an employer’s ability to hire paid interns or restrict a paid employee’s ability to get college credit for their work. It also does not limit unpaid internships for non-profits who rely on volunteers for their labor.

In most cases, independent contractor (1099) positions are not appropriate as internships because the legal definition of an independent contractor is at odds with the concept of an internship.

Workers’ Compensation

Unpaid interns are only covered for Worker’s Compensation and liability insurance if they are getting credit. For credit-bearing, unpaid internships, MSU Denver will provide coverage for Workers’ Compensation and limited liability insurance subject to limits set by the State of Colorado. For paid internships, it is expected that the employer will provide such coverage. A stipend is considered a paid position and the employer is responsible for Workers’ Compensation.

Equal Employment Opportunity

The employer will comply with all federal, state statutes and college policies relating to nondiscrimination, including but not limited to discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin, creed, religion, sex (including sexual harassment), sexual orientation or preference, gender identity and expressions, age, marital status, disability, Vietnam-era Veteran or other Protected Veteran.

Mutual Agreement on Position Terms and Expectations

The employer should identify the specific terms and conditions of employment (ex: the start and end dates of the internship; compensation; organizational and/or reporting relationships; principal duties, tasks or responsibilities; working conditions; confidentiality; and any other expectations of the employer). These should be discussed when recruiting an intern, and also at their orientation, so there is no misunderstanding regarding these matters. Also, take time to advise your interns of appropriate workplace behavior, the organization’s harassment policy, and complaint procedures. It may make sense to document such a discussion with a written agreement.
1. Give me real work
It can’t be said too many times that interns want to work and learn. They want to contribute to your organization and become discouraged if they feel they are just doing busy work or routine administrative work that should be done by paid support staff.

2. Please provide feedback
Remember that interns are students, and they may not have the business skills and experiences that you take for granted. If your intern makes an oversight, just pull him or her aside and explain how the situation should be handled in the future.

3. I want to be included too
Is there a staff meeting they can attend? Can they tag along to that next project meeting or office luncheon? Include them in the daily life of your workplace. After all, if you help them gain a broader perspective, it will help everyone involved.

4. Please explain
When you assign work, make sure you give a detailed explanation. While the work may seem trivial and obvious to you, it may not be obvious to someone who’s never done it before. Patience and a few extra minutes at the beginning will pay off later when your intern can produce good work independently.

5. I want to see my supervisor, please
Make sure that you remain accessible to your intern and avoid any isolating work that leaves the intern without direct access to supervision and guidance. As newcomers, interns may not speak up if they’re feeling ignored, so the burden of making sure they’re okay is on the mentor. Regular times should be scheduled to meet with the intern.

6. Be prepared for my arrival
Brief your staff on the student’s impending arrival, and help the intern get started on a positive note. Have the workspace, supplies, and tools ready for the intern’s arrival. Also, make sure you provide the intern with a clear list of roles and responsibilities, highlighting any relevant deadlines and expectations.

7. Appreciate me
Remember to enjoy your intern! You will both benefit if you take time to appreciate the contributions made by your intern.

The Internship Program staff at the Applied Learning Center at MSU Denver is here to help you. Be sure to call us at 303 556-3290 if you need anything.