

**California State University, Dominguez Hills  
Career Center**

# **Best Practices for Internship Sites**

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## **Questions?**

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## Carefully Plan the Core Elements of Your Program

1. Carefully consider if your company/organization is prepared to invest the necessary time to work with interns and to become co-educators along with university personnel. Is there sufficient staff time available to directly supervise, counsel, and mentor students? Is there sufficient staff time available to coordinate the overall components of an intern program?
2. Are there staff members who want to supervise intern students? (Note: the question is not, "Are there staff members who want to have an intern student?")
3. Do potential intern supervisors have the necessary professional expertise so they can "teach" students in a specific area? Example: If a student will be working on a marketing project, is the supervisor experienced in the field of marketing. Remember that students are not experts, they are learners.
4. Are there sufficient resources to have an intern program? Consider office space and equipment, supplies, computer workstations and financial resources for wages, benefits, mileage or parking reimbursement, etc.
5. What work/projects does the organization or company need to have done? What can students learn from performing that work?
6. Would the work you need done be appropriate for students to perform? Are the work activities achievable for a student who is unfamiliar with or has very limited knowledge of the organization's history, culture, and operating procedures?
7. What work hours would be best for accomplishing the tasks/projects? Can student work hours be flexible if necessary?
8. How long a commitment would be appropriate? One semester? Or based on the planned tasks/projects, is a longer commitment required?
9. Would the amount of responsibility required by the tasks be appropriate to a university student's capabilities and maturity? What grade level would be appropriate for the work under consideration? First year, sophomore, junior, or a senior level student?
10. What academic majors would best support or relate to the work?
11. What time of the year is best for listing an internship opening and conducting the selection process? What time of the year is best to bring a student into your organization?
12. The answers to these questions will determine your company/organization's readiness to assume the responsibilities of a student program. The company may be in the perfect situation to manage top quality internship experiences. Or your organization may be better served by hiring part-time workers to do non-academically related tasks or you may find that the organization doesn't have the time, staff, or appropriate assignments to warrant students at the present time.

# Identify Appropriate Experience Based Learning Activities for Students Early in the Planning Stage

1. California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) seeks high quality experience based learning opportunities that involve challenging student work assignments, which will complement the academic programs.
2. As a first step draw up a preliminary list of work-learning activities that fit the needs of your company/organization. An intern may be able to take on a project that full-time staff haven't had time to do – projects that have been put on the “back burner.”
3. Since internship programs are relevant to the academic mission of the University, work assignments need to link both classroom and workplace learning.
4. Work-learning activities need to be substantive and productive - as near-professional level as possible. Intern students need to perceive that their work is making a useful contribution to the sponsoring organization and that their work experience is preparing them for their future professional life.
5. The best work assignments provide students with a variety of tasks/projects, while accommodating the needs of the organization. A program designed to fully take advantage of the breadth of experiences available within an organization will provide students with rich learning opportunities.
6. Determine whether tasks/projects under consideration are suited to undergraduate level students who may or may not have had all their required courses in a particular major yet. Examples of tasks/projects that undergraduate students have been responsible for:
  - a. Performing routine laboratory tests
  - b. Assisting with the writing or editing of organizational materials
  - c. Designing graphic materials
  - d. Assisting with financial reports
  - e. Conducting surveys
  - f. Assisting with a fundraising project
  - g. Gathering market information
  - h. Assisting with marketing activities
  - i. Designing web sites
  - j. Planning/facilitating events

These are just a few ideas – the sky is the limit. The only restriction is that CSUDH prefers that only 20% or less of an intern's work time involve clerical or non-professional tasks.

7. Consider what training can be provided to give the student the necessary skills in order to best accomplish the identified tasks or project.

# Well Written Position Descriptions Help Recruit Top Intern Candidates

1. The planning that takes place in the first two phases provides much of the information you will use in writing position descriptions.
2. A good internship position description will:
  - Help promote the name and reputation of your organization or company.
  - Help your organization attract the right candidates for your internship program.
  - Help the CSUDH Career Center promote your internship opportunities.
  - Help students make good decisions about which positions to apply for.
  - Help students prepare their resumes and cover letters to send to you.
  - Help students prepare for interviews with you.
3. Attempt to include as much information as possible in your internship position description:
  - Position title (make it descriptive, not just "intern")
  - Name of organization or company
  - Include information about the function or mission of the organization or department
  - Where will the internship be located: city/state
  - Work activities/duties/responsibilities
  - Qualifications/requirements: necessary skills, knowledge areas, appropriate academic majors, specific coursework, foreign languages, computer knowledge
  - Special opportunities: travel, professional meetings, benefits
  - Specific days/work hours, if necessary
  - Appropriate dress
  - Approximate duration: start date, ending date
  - Number of hours per week
  - Financial compensation: \$ per hour
  - Application deadline, if appropriate or indicate if the position is open until filled
4. In addition to skills and requirements you have specified, the university may need to consider additional factors related to institutional academic or risk management policies. Ask about the university's policies and practices ahead of time.
5. Well-planned and carefully written position description will prevent possible misunderstanding about the company/organization's expectations and the terms of the internship.

## **Take Time to Carefully Interview & Select Students**

1. At this point in the recruitment process, you may expect that prospective interns will have submitted a resume and cover letter to you. They will be expecting to participate in an interview if you consider them viable candidates.
2. Although you may have interviewed and hired many employees in the past, the nature of a student program may require a slightly different approach to the interview process.
  - a. Ask about class projects or assignments that have been particularly stimulating for the student.
  - b. Ask the student to articulate how he/she sees their choice of major relating to their professional goals.
  - c. Ask what relevant skills the student has developed in their academic preparation.
  - d. Ask a student to discuss any previous work experience, even if it's not directly related to your internship position. Focus on the basic skills and competencies you require of all your employees.
  - e. A student might be asked to describe their personal characteristics or strengths that relate to the position.
  - f. Ask students for examples that illustrate their ability to accept responsibility.
  - g. Ask him/her how he/she motivates him or herself. Ask for examples.
  - h. Ask a student to describe how he/she has demonstrated particular initiative or solved problems.
  - i. Ask how extracurricular activities have helped his/her career development.
  - j. Expect a student to be able to articulate what he/she knows about your organization. Have they done their homework?
  - k. Ask a student how her/his academic work to date can be applied to the internship opportunity with your organization.
  - l. Ask him/her to tell you what they want to learn by working with your organization.
  - m. Ask the student to identify what technical skills he or she will bring to an internship position with your company.
4. Once you have made your selection, be sure to notify the students who applied but were not selected. No one likes to be kept in the dark.
5. Equally important - notify the CSUDH Career Center of your selection. We may need to assist the student with course enrollment and alert the student's faculty internship coordinator as to the placement of the student with your organization.

# **New Interns Require Orientation to Your Organization**

1. Many university students are unfamiliar with the activities, environment and objectives of business, industry and organizations in the community. Even though they may have worked part-time or summers during school, these experiences may not have exposed them to organizational politics, the need for confidentiality, the importance of teamwork, or the profit-making focus of business.
2. An orientation to the overall organization as well as to student's specific work area is a necessary component of a quality internship program. The orientation is just as important in a small organization as it is in a large corporate setting.
3. Plan the orientation to be one of the very first activities once the student reports for work. The earlier a student understands what your organization does and how it operates, the sooner they can assume assigned responsibilities and become productive members of your team.
4. Provide a well-planned new intern orientation. It might take one day, one week or even the first few weeks the student is on the job. Consider including elements such as:
  - a. Company organizational structure
  - b. Special industry jargon
  - c. Specific work standards and procedures -
    - Reporting relationships
    - Access to the supervisor (days, times, duration)
    - Tasks that can be completed without supervisory approval
    - Mail and telephone systems
    - Approved format/style for corporate correspondence
    - Corporate safety/risk management regulations
    - Attendance procedures
    - Periodic forms or reports to be completed
    - Security and confidentiality issues, policies, procedures
    - Acceptable dress and appearance
  - d. Expectations for maintaining the premises and personal work areas
  - e. Introduce them to personnel who can answer different types of questions
  - f. Cover how the organization expects the student to deal with clients, customers, and vendors
5. There are numerous ways to communicate this information. The orientation should include a tour of the facilities and introductions to the other employees. It is often helpful to give a new intern materials to read about the company/organization, such as newsletters, annual reports, organization chart, memos from the CEO, procedure manuals, etc. Encourage students to spend breaks and lunchtimes in places where employees gather so everyone gets to know each other.

## **Students Learn Best with High Quality, Consistent On-Site Supervision**

1. The professional staff member designated as the student's site supervisor is the critical factor between a successful and an unsuccessful internship program. The site supervisor can "make or break" a student work-learning experience.
2. It is generally expected that the person responsible for supervising the student is an experienced supervisor in the organization.
3. If problems occur, the site supervisor needs to counsel the intern and communicate with the appropriate university personnel.
4. You may have some interaction with your interns' faculty internship advisor or the Office of Internships through telephone calls, on-site visits, progress reports or written evaluations. They can also help you find solutions if difficulty occurs (intern attendance or punctuality problems, low motivation, unsatisfactory work or personal conflicts).
5. As an intern supervisor for your organization or organization, you use all the skills required for any effective supervisory relationship – providing leadership, being a role model, delegating responsibilities, motivating, communicating effectively, encouraging skill development, coaching, mentoring, providing feedback, monitoring work, evaluating.
6. Students will look to you as a mentor who will assist their transition from the classroom to the work environment. It is important to provide opportunities to bridge the two areas.
7. Meet with your interns regularly to provide feedback and reinforce positive attitudes and performance. During these meetings, the student can: provide progress reports, ask questions, learn how their work is contributing to the overall organization, participate in evaluation of their strengths and areas needing development, and gain a clearer sense of their professional path.
8. Give interns opportunities to observe and/or participate in company and other professional meetings
9. Allow students to interview key company personnel to learn how different areas function and to ask employees to describe their professional preparation and career paths.
10. Contact the CSUDH Career Center immediately if the internship conditions must be altered, such as a change in supervisors, delays in the availability of data needed by the students to complete an assignment, transfer or termination of an employee involved in the intern's work, or other unanticipated changes.
11. You might want interns to compile a work portfolio. When students leave an internship experience with tangible evidence of completed work, they have the beginnings of a portfolio to show future employers, to offer to their faculty advisors as a basis for grade evaluations, and to generally provide a sense of accomplishment. A portfolio also can be an effective tool to facilitate discussion between you and the student, particularly at the conclusion of the work

period. Common items that might be included in a student's practice based learning portfolio could include items such as:

- Reports they have helped produce
- Organizational structure chart of the company
- Project flow charts that show their participation
- Their performance appraisals
- Proposals they helped write
- Correspondence they assisted with
- Citations or awards they received
- Contracts they helped write
- Program outlines they assisted with
- Videotapes of presentations they have developed
- Newspaper clippings and press releases about the company/organization
- Materials they created or helped to create, such as brochures, agendas, flyers, manuals, newsletters, charts/graphs, posters
- Copies of legislation they researched
- Photos of products, displays or exhibits they helped produce
- Survey results
- Research reports they assisted with

Note: the company or organization must be very clear about its confidentiality policies and what materials/documents an intern can include and in what format (names or identifying information blacked out) is permissible.

12. Plan a mid-point evaluation session for interns. Formally evaluate a student's performance so the student knows where he/she stands. You will want to consider the quality and timeliness of the work produced to date, ability to take and follow direction, work habits, and areas needing development. Document this information; it will provide data for the final evaluation and serve as a reference point for the student's subsequent performance.

## **Evaluate Student Learning & Productivity; Assess Your Program**

1. The evaluation phase brings closure to the internship experience. By having developed a well-planned student program that included a complete position description with viable work activities and regularly scheduled meetings (formal and informal), you have an excellent foundation for evaluation. At this point identify how the student is to present completed projects and how you expect him or her to transfer work or information to other individuals.
2. Some faculty internship advisors require that you conduct a final evaluation and they provide a specific evaluation form. Even if a form isn't required, you might create your own to use during your final evaluation meeting with the student. A faculty member is, of course, the person responsible for assigning grades or credit for the internship. The information you provide about the students' performance, or specific projects completed during the work period, can contribute to that evaluation.
4. If your organization's performance appraisal system can include your intern students, you may want to consider allowing them to participate in this process. It will make your student staff feel as though they are true members of your team and will expose them to a key professional development function of the organization.
5. Schedule a final formal evaluation session with the student. Provide specific, quantifiable data (use examples whenever possible). Evaluate observed, ongoing performance rather than initial impressions or a dominant trait that can overshadow other qualities. Be objective in your appraisal; beware of personal biases and attitudes that may differ from the student's perspectives or background.
6. Near the conclusion of the internship work period, students may ask you for a letter of recommendation. The written evaluations you have prepared will be very helpful references for recommendation letters.
7. If employment with your organization is a present or future possibility, give the students as much information as possible about the type of work, site location and timeframes, and other details for gaining regular employment.
8. Each time a student completes an internship in your organization's internship program, it is appropriate to assess what worked and what needs adjustment. Make the necessary improvements to your program and prepare to recruit your next student intern.