



The Hiring Authority's Guide to a Successful Internship Program

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The rise in global competition for a talented and innovative workforce brings opportunities for Wisconsin organizations to gain a competitive edge. Developing a post-secondary internship program is an impactful strategy for investing in UW Colleges/UW-Extension's future success. Internship programs provide the answers to some of our organizations' most challenging issues including increasing diversity, gaining fresh perspectives, and discovering future leaders in higher education. An internship is often an overlooked, untapped resource among organizations. This guide will outline the basic fundamentals involved in designing any internship program.

6 Ways to Get the Most out of Your Internship Program

1. Recruit the right candidates by writing a clear and engaging internship description.
2. Create a handbook for new interns to help orient them to your campus/division and its expectations and to serve as a guide throughout the internship.
3. Designate a professional mentor for each intern.
4. Structure the internship with a balance of long- and short-term project work and non-time-sensitive background or day-to-day work.
5. Consider offering flex-time to give interns the freedom to plan their schedules on a weekly basis.
6. Think of ways in which you can foster a welcoming atmosphere in your campus/division community.

Understanding Your Campus/Division and its Needs

Prior to hiring an intern, a departmental unit must understand how interns will fit in within your campus' or division's goals and culture. A clear understanding of your department's needs and goals will help make the internship most valuable for the student as well as maximize the benefits for your unit.

Questions that may determine what kind of program will work best for you:

- What does your campus/division hope to achieve from the program?
- Are you looking to fulfill a need on a specific project? Will this internship(s) encompass one major project, or entail a variety of small projects?
- Where will you locate your intern(s)? Do you have adequate workspace for them?
- What talents, academic background, and experience do you want in an intern? Decide on standards of quality early on to help you select the best candidate.
- Who will be primarily responsible for the intern(s)? Will that person be a mentor, supervisor, or both?
- What projects or activities will the intern(s) work on? Be as specific as possible. Interns desire structure and meaningful work.

It is important to set goals for the internship up front, and to evaluate it once it is completed. Did the internship meet or exceed your department's goals? If not, how can the program be redesigned to ensure a meaningful internship in the future?

Increasing Diversity is a Process

Increasing diversity in your campus or division is a process: it takes time, energy, and a plan that is communicated to your administrative staff and team. If you haven't already done so, begin evaluating your community and the message you send through materials, traditions and programs. Continue the process by creating a plan for this year. Figure out what you can do now to recruit a staff population, including interns that are increasingly diverse. Demonstrate commitment by developing a track record of working with diverse populations and addressing the issues they prioritize. Over time, your reputation will assist in attracting diversity.

Giving Your Internships Purpose

Students are seeking opportunities that stimulate their interests and provide real-world experiences. A meaningful purposeful internship program will:

- Ensure the assignment of challenging projects and tasks
 - Design a preliminary list of potential activities that fit the needs of the department
 - Give interns focused, purposeful roles to keep them motivated
- Relate well to students
 - Design projects that complement students' academic programs
 - Give them broad exposure to the organization
- Provide adequate, reliable and regular supervision and mentoring
 - Serve as an information resource
 - Ensure interns are keeping pace and accomplishing goals
- Expose them to the mission and the activities of our organization

What Type of Work Does and Intern Expect?

An important step to a successful internship is deciding what kinds of work and projects the intern will do and managing that process throughout the internship. Interns want to be challenged. Generally speaking, a major issue in many unsuccessful internships is not having enough work for the intern to do – rarely is the reverse true. The best way to structure the internship work is to plan for three types of work:

1. Project Work – This can be a special analysis or project that will require the intern to use his/her skills relating to his/her major area of study. This work should be what draws the applicants to this position to give them experience for his/her future career and piques their interest in working for UW Colleges/UW-Extension.
2. Background Work – This should be some general work, related to their field of study, that is not time-sensitive and may be less than exciting, but the work is important and requires

some skill. This should not be “busy” work; however, the intern should be able to keep busy and feel productive with this work during times when the project work is “on hold” (i.e. waiting for approval or clarification).

3. Unexpected work on issues that arise during the normal ebb and flow of business -- This could also be called “helping put out fires.” Providing the interns with a taste of the true nature of our organization and the wide variety of issues that employees must handle is a valuable experience. Interns appreciate the challenge and variety that comes from helping with these new tasks.

The balance of primary, background, and day-to-day work will enable the intern to be productive and have a well-rounded learning experience.

Creating an Internship Job Description

Treat the job description as an opportunity to showcase the internship(s). For some students the internship job description may be the first time they have ever heard about the internship program. Why will students want to apply for your internship over others? Does your job description illustrate how it will be a unique experience? Do you fully define the benefits or incentives UW Colleges/UW-Extension can provide? Do you describe what sets UW Colleges/UW-Extension apart from the rest in higher education? Do you present your campus/division as one that values diversity and inclusion? Write the job description in an interesting way that engages students; this may increase your chances of finding an ideal student.

Writing an effective internship description is essential to recruiting the right intern. Students really want to know what they will be doing.

If you’re not sure what specific projects you might have the intern work on, provide a range of “potential” projects and responsibilities. Then state that you will match the actual duties to the intern’s interests or skills or with the specific unit’s needs. If you know that the intern will be working on a wide variety of projects that may change daily, state that in the internship description. Giving a clear internship description is the first step in recruiting the right candidates.

An effective job description should:

- Explain the organization’s goals and mission
- Outline the intern’s responsibilities and potential tasks/projects
- Illustrate the necessary qualifications
 - Skills (computer, analytical, design, communications, etc.)
 - Education level (year, GPA, etc.)
 - Majors
- Clarify the duration of the internship
 - Hours required per week
 - Flexibility with schedule or specific hours that need to be covered

- During the summer (start and end dates)
- Provide the job location
- Specify how to apply
 - Provide contact information

Recruiting An Intern

Where Have All the Interns Gone? – Finding an Intern Candidate

Recruiting interns is one of the greatest challenges to developing a successful internship program. Whether you live in a rural community or a major city, locating diverse interns can be difficult due to a variety of factors including not knowing how to reach or market to students and competition that may exist among Wisconsin organizations and those in other states.

A number of tools exist to help you find the intern who is right for your campus/division. The big take-away from the lists below is to use multiple recruiting methods and outlets to help increase awareness about your internship program and ultimately connect with students.

Traditional Recruiting Strategies

- Online Job Postings: There are many different outlets through which to post internship information, including your unit's website, Career Services websites, and Craigslist.
 - Create an account and add your job listing to <http://www.jobs4wigrads.com/>. This free site posts to student job boards at all 13 UW-System four-year colleges.
 - Similarly, a job listing at <http://www.wisconsintechconnect.com/> will be seen by students at all 16 Wisconsin technical colleges.
 - Depending on the type of position, you might check into www.idealists.org for posting as well.
- Career Fairs: These provide a chance to meet many students within a short period of time.
- Guest Lecturer in Classes: Your personal insight helps students to learn more about your unit as you develop a positive image and working relationship with the College, University or County.
- Employee Referrals: Employees can be a great source of information about potential candidates.
- Faculty Referrals: If you already have a professional relationship with faculty members on a campus, they can help refer their top students as well as provide students with information about your unit.
- Postings in Print: College newspapers and other publications on campus provide a way to advertise internship opportunities.

Creative Recruiting Strategies

- Announcements made via social media, such as an established Facebook fan page or Twitter. Craft messaging that resonates with diverse candidates.
- Posting on social media professional sites such as LinkedIn.

- Become a mentor or speaker for an organization/club on campus and/or in local schools.
- Become connected with your local Chamber of Commerce.
- Contact the local Workforce Development Center.
- Place advertisements with the school district and technical college.
- Outreach to UW Madison’s PEOPLE program or Information Technology Program (ITA) staff.
- Local radio and newspaper media sources.
- Contact neighborhood centers and churches.
- Reach out to nonprofit organizations that specialize in placing minorities and other target populations in summer jobs.
- Consider what other local organizations in your area could potentially attract diverse candidates that would be interested in your internship.
- Send your job announcement to previous intern participants and ask them to refer individuals that they think could be interested.
- Engage families and friends in the recruitment process.

Hiring an Intern

In many ways, hiring an intern is similar to hiring an employee. The following information will guide you in making the right hiring decisions for your unit and its needs.

What to Look for When Hiring Interns

How do you choose whom to interview? Consider the following recommendations in addition to your unit’s guidelines for hiring employees.

When evaluating resumes and applications students should be evaluated on:

- Skills and qualifications
- Relevant coursework or class projects that relate to the internship
- Other internships and/or work experiences
- Extracurricular activities
 - Leadership positions
 - Volunteer work
 - Community engagement
- Honors and achievements

Also consider:

- Writing skills (proper spelling and grammar)
- Submission of a cover letter (shows an interest in the internship)
- Specific talents indicated on the application/resume as well as observed in the interview process (such as being a self-starter, creative, positive, achievement-oriented, adaptable, etc.)

Keep in mind that with any internship program you are working with a pool of students who may not have all of the desired qualifications/skills you seek. However, if you select students who have the right talents for the job, with some training, students may be able to learn these desired skills and even bring fresh, new perspectives and ideas

Give careful thought to the minimum qualifications you set while you are creating the job description, as it is one of the most consequential decisions you'll make during the search and screen process. Minimum qualifications should not reflect your "ideal" or preferred qualifications, but rather describe the basic qualifications, knowledge, or experience required for a candidate to be considered eligible for the position. You cannot hire someone who doesn't possess all the minimal qualifications, so it's essential that you're very conscientious when establishing these criteria.

Setting lower minimum standards enables you to consider a wider number and variety of applicants, and gives you the flexibility to provide a promising candidate with an opportunity to grow. On the other hand, more severe or specific minimum qualifications will limit the size and diversity of your applicant pool, but may be necessary if the position requires specialized knowledge or skills.

The Interview Process

Internship interviews will help you evaluate if a student is a good fit for your unit. The interview process for internships will most likely not be as in-depth as a regular job interview. Since students may be new to the interview process, it's recommended that you share in advance the types of questions (or even specific questions) students will be asked as well as any relevant work, project samples, etc. to share with the interviewers.

The following are potential interview questions to help you better evaluate and understand the student:

- Why did you apply for this internship?
- Why did you choose your major?
- What is your experience with (software, programs, etc.)?
- What relevant experience of yours relates to the internship?
- What do you hope to gain from this internship?
- Provide a recent example of when you_____?
- When are you available for this internship?
- What does your schedule look like during the week? How many hours do you feel you can work?
- When do you plan on graduating?

Selecting an Intern

Once you've selected your intern, work with your Human Resources department to create an offer letter (specific contact information is located at the end of this document). An offer letter should include:

- Dates/duration of the internship
- Specific pay
- Deadline for acceptance
- Contact information

Evaluating Your Internship Program

Creating and building a successful internship program is just the beginning. Evaluating your internship program on a regular basis will help you connect more effectively with students and provide you with the best opportunities for discovering future organizational leaders. Evaluations will encourage improvements, and these developments will continue to keep both the interns and your employees satisfied with the program. The following evaluators should be considered:

- Conversion Rate
 - An effective internship program may convert a percentage of its interns to employees.
- Retention Rate
 - When interns are hired full-time, measure how long they are with our organization compared with employees hired without a prior internship at UW Colleges/UW-Extension. There is some evidence to suggest that former interns will remain at their workplace longer than other employees.
- Performance Ratings
 - Compare the performance ratings among your employees. If your ratings could be improved, consider adjusting your intern selection process to meet these unaddressed areas for improvement.
- Student Evaluation
 - Periodic surveys, informal check-ins, and exit interviews can help you to meet students' internship expectations and goals. Supervisors are expected to check in at least monthly with interns to elicit feedback. Testimonials can also serve as elements for future marketing pieces.
- Manager and/or Mentor Evaluation
 - Similar to student evaluations, manager and/or mentor evaluations can address how an internship program can more effectively meet the needs of staff. See the attached past evaluation questions for examples.

Resources

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (May 2010). 2010 Internship Co-op Survey. Bethlehem, Penn.

For more information from the National Association of Colleges and Employers visit www.nacweb.org/internships

Adapted from materials by Allison Hatch, Nebraska Department of Economic Development,
www.InternNE.com

Summer Affirmative Action Internship Program, Office of State Employment Relations (Wisconsin).
[OSER SAAIP](#)

[UW Madison's Letters and Science Internship website](#)

[UW Milwaukee's Internship website](#)

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