

Starting and Maintaining A Quality

Internship Program In

Wisconsin

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INTRODUCTION

How can organizations in Wisconsin meet the needs of today and prepare the workforce of the future? One solution is to develop a quality internship program. This booklet will assist you in doing just that.

What Is An Internship?

An internship is any carefully monitored work or service experience in which a student has intentional learning goals and reflects actively on what she or he is learning throughout the experience. The National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) list the following common characteristics of an internship:

- Duration of anywhere from a month to two years, but a typical experience usually lasts from three to six months.
- Generally a one-time experience.
- May be part-time or full-time.
- May be paid or non-paid.
- Internships may be part of an educational program and carefully monitored and evaluated for academic credit, or internships can be part of a learning plan that someone develops individually.
- 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.
- Learning activities common to most internships include learning objectives, observation, reflection, evaluation and assessment.
- An effort is made to establish a reasonable balance between the intern's learning goals and the specific work an organization needs done.
- Internships promote academic, career and/or personal development.

How Do Internships Benefit Wisconsin Employers?

In addition to providing business the ability to "test drive" some of the best and brightest talent in Wisconsin, developing an internship program gives businesses access to:

- A year-round source of highly motivated pre-professionals
- New perspectives to old problems
- Visibility of your organization is increased on campus
- Quality candidates for temporary or seasonal positions and projects
- Freedom for professional staff to pursue more creative projects
- Flexible, cost-effective work force not requiring a long-term employer commitment
- Proven, cost-effective way to recruit and evaluate potential employees
- Your image in the community is enhanced as you contribute your expertise to the educational enterprise

STEPS TO BEGINNING AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Designing an internship program that meets your needs

As varied as companies are in age, size, industry and product, so too are their internship activities. How do you know what kind of program will work best for you? Designing an internship program to meet your needs is as easy as five steps.

Step 1: Set goals

- What does your company hope to achieve from the program?
- Are you a small company searching for additional help on a project?
- Is your company growing quickly and having difficulty finding motivated new employees?
- Are you a nonprofit that doesn't have a lot of money to pay, but can provide an interesting and rewarding experience?
- Is your organization searching out new employees with management potential?

A careful discussion with management in the organization can create a consensus on program goals that can be understood by all involved. The program and internship can be designed to best meet those expectations. As many staffing professionals may know, in order for a program to be successful, it will require the commitment of management. After all, management may be the people providing the internship experience.

Step 2: Write a plan

Carefully plan and write out your internship program and goals. After all, managers, mentors, interns and university career centers are all going to be reading what you write about the internship. Draft a job description that clearly explains the job's duties. Do you want someone for a specific project? General support around the workplace? To give the intern a taste of everything your company does? Structure the internship ahead of time so that you can be sure to meet your goals and not find yourself floundering partway through. (see the Internship Position Description later)

Things to think about include:

Will you pay the intern? If so, how much? Wages vary widely from field to field and location to location, so be sure yours are competitive or offer competitive incentives.

Where will you put the intern? Do you have adequate workspace for them? Will you help him or her to make parking arrangements, living arrangements, etc.?

What sort of academic background and experience do you want in an intern?

Decide on standards for quality beforehand — it'll help you narrow down the choices and find the best candidates.

Who will have the primary responsibility for the intern? Will that person be a mentor or merely a junior manager gaining management experience?

How many hours per week will the intern work? Do you need someone full-time in the summer? During the school year, the intern will also be meeting academic requirements. How many hours

do you need the student to commit to while they do so?

What will the intern be doing? Be as specific as possible. Interns, like others in the process of learning, need structure so they don't become lost, confused or bored.

Do you want to plan a program beyond the work you give your interns?

Will there be special training programs, performance reviews, lunches with executives, social events? Keep in mind that your interns are walking advertisements for your company. If they have a good experience working for you, they're likely to tell their friends — word gets around. A bad internship, by contrast, can only hurt your chances of attracting good students for next year.

These are just some of the questions to consider. Your company's approach will depend on your specific resources and needs.

A very important part of your plan should be the assignment of a mentor or supervisor — that is, someone from the intern's department who will be in charge of the intern. This person doesn't have to be a teacher per se, but should be selected because he or she likes to teach or train and has the resources to do it. If the person you select has never mentored an intern before, give him or her some basic training in mentoring.

Step 3: Recruit an intern(s)

How will you find those ideal candidates to fill your internship position(s)? ***The number-one tip from those who have established programs is to get out there early!*** This cannot be overemphasized to companies that want the very best interns.

Begin searching three to four months before you need a student to begin. Starting early has other advantages: the longer you accept applications, the better your chance of finding the best person for the job. The sooner you get one, the longer you have to form a good working relationship with him or her.

And remember, choose your interns just as carefully as you'd choose permanent employees. After all, they might be permanent employees someday. You're making an investment. Time and money will go into this person, and they won't pay off if they go into a flawed vessel. This is where the interview will come in handy: Is the intern truly motivated, or does he or she just want a job? Will the intern fit into your corporate culture? Does he or she have the level of experience you need? With careful consideration of whom to hire at the beginning, you can avoid some of the most common pitfalls of internships.

Last, but certainly not least, learn the legal implications of hiring interns. Just like any other workers, they are subject to legal protections and regulations. Protect yourself and your intern by knowing the laws: How much can you pay him or her? What work can and can't you assign? This is especially important if your company employs a lot of international students, who need special qualifications to work in the U.S. Consult your corporate lawyer or a college's office of international education, if you think you might run into problems.

Step 4: Manage the intern(s)

This is the easy part: Once you've hired a worker, you have him or her work, right? That's true for interns as well as regular employees, but with an intern, you'll be making an important first impression. The beginning days of the internship program are often its defining days. When you give them their first tasks, you're signaling what can be expected in the future. If you give them nothing or very little to do, it sends a message that this job will be easy — and boring. Interns don't want that, and of course, neither do employers. The organization of your internship program will probably be the single most important influence on an intern's impression of your company, and thus the chances that he or she will come back. So how do you "plan for success"?

Consider the goals of your program. The nature of the program and the activities that you choose to undertake should directly relate to your program goals.

First things first: Orient your intern to his or her new workplace. This might take the form of a conventional orientation program or merely a walk around the office, depending on the size of your company. After all, even though they may not be permanent employees, they'll be spending a great deal of time in your workplace. Give interns an overview of your organization; some companies give talks or hand out information about the company's history, vision and services. Explain who does what and what the intern's duties will be.

Introduce him or her to co-workers and point out the kitchen and bathroom, where supplies are kept, etc.. Making your intern at home in the office is your first step to bringing him or her back.

Give your intern the resources he or she needs to do the job. That may sound obvious, but you'd be surprised at how many companies stick their interns out in the hallway or transfer them from desk to desk. That sends a potent message you don't want to send: Interns aren't important; we don't want you here. Give the intern a desk, point out the supply room, and introduce the tech support people. If you intimidate your interns into silence, you could miss out on valuable contributions to your projects—or warnings about impending problems.

Keep an eye on the intern. This doesn't mean to watch their every move, but do make sure you know what's happening with their daily tasks. Watch for signs that the intern is confused or bored. As often as silence means that an intern is busy, it also could mean that he or she is confused and shy about telling you so. It's easy to be shy in a workplace full of older strangers who all know each other. See whether the intern is trying to do anything that requires someone else's input. Make sure that work is taking precedence over web browsing. Paying attention early helps you head off problems and bad habits early on.

Along those same lines, it's important to give them lots of feedback! Especially if your interns have never done this kind of work before, they'll want to know if their work is measuring up to your expectations. No matter what the level of experience, they need you, as a more experienced worker, to let them know if their work is officially "okay".

Periodically, examine what your intern has produced and make suggestions. Weekly supervision meetings can help you remain aware of your intern's work.

Evaluate the intern's progress every now and then.

Remember those goals you outlined before? A few weeks after the internship begins, it's time to see how well you and your intern are meeting those goals. Evaluation processes differ. Yours might be as formal as written evaluations every three weeks or as informal as occasional lunches with the internship coordinator and/or the intern's mentor. Some companies have the intern evaluate the experience and the company as well. Again, your structure is largely up to your corporate culture and needs. As an added bonus, these evaluations will be handy later if you decide to interview a former intern for full-time work, or to publicize how successful -your program has been. (see forms further on)

Maintaining program popularity will require hard evidence that your company is getting a return on its investment. Some companies have adopted a process of formal exit interviews. Through this process they can determine if interns are leaving the company having had a good experience and provide valuable feedback to managers and for program planning in the following year.

In addition to qualitative measures, a number of quantitative measures have also been adopted. Some common measures include the number of interns that become full-time employees; repeat requests for interns from managers; and growing numbers of intern applicants. In order to successfully measure your own program outcome, you should return to the stated program goals, and address those outcomes.

Keep your focus on the future

With the job market experiencing a dearth of qualified employees, it only makes sense to investigate early those quality community college, technical school and college students whom you can bring back later. Take on interns now and you'll have a competitive advantage in recruiting the best workers—you'll already be known to the employees you want most. Your new workers will already be trained for your workplace and loyal to your company, lowering training time, recruiting costs and turnover rates. You'll build a reputation that will pay off with students, colleges and the community. And your company will save money while benefiting from the input of talented, enthusiastic, innovative people. With all of these advantages, you might find that you can't afford not to do internships.

LEGAL ISSUES

Do you have to pay interns?

The U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which applies to all companies that have at least two employees directly engaged in interstate commerce and annual sales of at least \$500,000.00, severely restricts an employer's ability to use unpaid interns or trainees. It does not limit an employer's ability to hire paid interns.

You don't have to pay interns who qualify as leaders/trainees. The U.S. Department of Labor has outlined six criteria for determining trainee status:

- 1) Interns cannot displace regular employees
- 2) Interns are not guaranteed a job at the end of the internship (though you may decide to hire them at the conclusion of the experience)
- 3) Interns are not entitled to wages during the internship

- 4) Interns must receive training from your company, even if it somewhat impedes the work of your organization
- 5) Interns must get hands-on experience with equipment and processes used in your industry
- 6) Interns' training must primarily benefit them, not the company.

Keep In Mind

Even if a student is working through a school program for which he or she is being "paid" in college credits, the student still has the right, under the FLSA, to be paid unless the employer is not deriving any immediate advantage by using him/her.

Paid interns make ideal workers — hungry to learn, eager to make a good impression and willing to perform even the most menial tasks. The relatively small amount of money employers spend on intern wages and benefits is a good investment, because it often produces future, long-term employees.

The employer should identify the specific terms and conditions of employment (e.g., dates of employment as intern, including date internship will end; compensation; organizational and/or reporting relationships; principal duties, tasks or responsibilities; working conditions; any other expectations of the employer), and should discuss these with the prospective intern, so that there is no misunderstanding regarding the relationship. Also, it may make good sense to document such a discussion with a written agreement setting forth both parties' understandings, and have it signed by both the employer and the intern.

If an intern is harassed at your organization, and you don't do anything about it, your organization opens itself to the risk of lawsuits. Take time to advise your interns of appropriate workplace behavior, the organization's harassment policy and complaint procedures.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The most common visa types employers will see on college campuses, when recruiting international undergraduate or graduate students for either full-time or internship positions are the F-1 and J-1 visas.

“An F-1 visa is granted to a person coming to the United States to attend a college, university, seminary, conservatory, academic high school, elementary school, or other academic institution or language training program approved by the U.S. Attorney General for study by foreign students. The visa holder plans to return home after completing studies. This is the most common non-immigrant visa for an international student attending undergraduate and graduate school. Students are granted F-1 status until the completion of the academic program and 12 months of post-program practical training. The purpose of the F-1 visa is to provide an opportunity for study in the United States.

Anything outside of study, including employment, is an exception to the visa. Authorization for employment is strictly limited to certain situations.

- The student holding F-1 status for a full academic year and in good academic standing may work off campus. Such work authorization is granted when the student has sustained unforeseen economic hardship. Also, the student may not work for more than 20 hours per week when school is in session, but may work full time during holidays and vacations, including breaks between terms, provided the student intends to register for the next school term.
- Curricular Practical Training: An F-1 student may perform curricular practical training prior to the completion of the educational program as part of his or her educational experience. The INS defines this type of training as ‘alternate work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum that is offered by sponsoring employers through agreements with the school.’
- Post-Completion Practical Training: This is temporary employment directly related to the student's major area of study that takes place after the student completes a full course of study. Authorization for this training may be granted for a maximum of 12 months of full-time or part-time work. Those on a student visa can only gain authorization once for this type of training.”

Employers can take advantage of a nationwide service provider who handles all the necessary paperwork and processing for international students to work in an organization. The largest provider is :

Immigration Support Services
1300 Bent Creek Blvd.
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055
Phone: 800-437-7313
Web: www.immigrationsupport.com

ORIENTING AND TRAINING INTERNS

Many students are unfamiliar with the activities, environment and objectives of business and industry. Even though your interns may have worked part-time to support their education, these experiences may not have exposed them to organizational politics, the need for confidentiality, the importance of teamwork, or the profit-making orientation of business. It is this orientation and training dimension of the internship experience that emphasizes the partnership role of the sponsoring organization.

The sooner your student interns understand what your organization does and how it operates, the sooner they can assume assigned responsibilities and become productive. You can help this process by providing the following kinds of information about your site:

Personnel Structure

- company organization
- special industry jargon
- specific work standards and procedures
- reporting relationships
- access to the supervisor (days, times, and duration)
- tasks that can be completed without supervisory approval
- work processing requests and timeliness
- mail and telephone systems
- approved form(s) for correspondence
- safety regulations
- procedure for signing off completed work
- periodic forms or reports to be completed
- security and confidentiality issues, if relevant
- acceptable dress and appearance
- maintaining the premises and workstation
- productive interactions with others at the work site
- personnel who can answer different kinds of questions
- how the organization wants the intern to deal with clients, customers, and vendors

You can communicate this information in several ways:

- take your interns on a tour of the facilities and introduce them to the other employees
- give your interns company materials to read such as newsletters, annual reports, an organization chart, or memos from the CEO
- encourage your interns to spend break and lunchtimes in places where employees gather
- schedule regular one-on-one meetings with them
- give the interns opportunities to observe (or participate in) professional meetings
- allow the interns to interview company personnel
- encourage the interns to walk around and observe others at work

The success of an internship depends on the partnership between representatives of the organization, the college, and the student. These three parties need to agree on the conditions of the internship, the responsibilities of each party, and the reporting requirements. The site supervisor is the critical link. You

guide your interns by providing direction and feedback. If a problem occurs, you counsel the students and contact the faculty supervisor, when necessary.

KEY POINTS

Develop a thorough orientation and training plan to be implemented when the interns begin work, so they will learn quickly and become productive members of your team.

Invest supervisory time to establish an important bond with interns and set a crucial tone for the internship experience.

ORIENTATION CHECKLIST

Experience shows that employers who take adequate time at the beginning of the internship to orient the student reap productivity and effectiveness more quickly than those who don't. To help acclimate interns, please take time initially to:

Explain the Mission of the Organization

- How did the organization start? Why?
- What is unique about your product or service?
- Who benefits from your product or service?
- What are the organization's current objectives?
- How may the intern contribute to those objectives?

Explain the Organization Structure

- Who reports to whom, and who, specifically, is the intern's supervisor?
- What is the intern's department responsible for?
- How are decisions made?
- Which personnel can answer different kinds of questions?

Outline Organizational Rules, Policies, Decorum and Expectations

- Is there special industry jargon?
- What are the specific work standards and procedures?
- What access to the supervisor (days, times, and duration) does the intern have?
- How should they process requests?
- How do the mail, telephone and e-mail/network systems work?
- What are the approved forms for correspondence?
- By what safety regulations must they abide?
- Is there a procedure for signing off completed work?
- What periodic forms or reports need to be completed?
- Are there security or confidentiality issues the intern should be aware of?
- What is acceptable with regard to dress and appearance?
- How should they maintain the premises and their work area?

Define the Intern's Responsibilities

- What is the intern's role?
- What projects will be assigned to him or her?
- What resources are available to the intern?
- What training is necessary?

- How does the organization want the intern to deal with clients and vendors?
- What tasks can be completed without supervisory approval?
- Do other employees understand the intern's role?

Monitor the Intern's Adjustment and Understanding of What is Expected

Make yourself visibly available to the intern and encourage the intern to ask questions

Assign someone who can periodically "check-in" with the intern

Provide feedback and constructive criticism

DEVELOPING WORK ACTIVITIES AND MEASURABLE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

A large part of producing effective position descriptions involves the development of challenging work assignments that complement students' academic programs. One way to do this is to design a preliminary list of work activities that will fit the needs of your department. A detailed description of typical tasks will help the college to promote your internship or field experience, and to screen the right candidates for the position. Later, when the interns you select join your team, you will have a chance to review the work activities and modify them according to the interns' knowledge and personal work/learning goals.

As part of the educational process, internship work activities should focus on projects specifically related to the career goals of the interns. Students who perform menial tasks will become quickly demoralized and will learn nothing about applying their expertise to a business environment. While many students work (or have worked) at part-time jobs to finance their education, an internship does not fall into the category of a job. It is actually part of their academic program and should offer every opportunity to link classroom learning to workplace experience.

Undergraduate students expect and appreciate clear direction regarding what is expected of them and frequent feedback concerning what and how they have done. (In their academic environment, clear direction and periodic feedback is the way of life.) It is also most important that the interns perceive their work is making a useful contribution to the sponsoring organization.

A particular concern at the undergraduate level is that the work assignments provide the interns with a variety of tasks, while accommodating the needs of the organization. Of course, some of the interns' responsibilities will involve repetition, because all work involves some repeated activity. We are suggesting, however, the program be designed to maximize the scope of the students' organizational experience.

Sample tasks that undergraduate students have provided for their sponsoring

- organizations include the following:
- performing laboratory tests
- writing handbooks or manuals
- designing posters, charts, graphs
- performing software/hardware modifications
- conducting studies and surveys
- compiling technical reports
- creating academic lesson plans
- conducting research
- generating marketing plans
- conducting training packages
- preparing budgets and financial reports
- working with people
- coordinating special events

Developing challenging work assignments relative to the students' abilities is a major thrust of the position description. Your final internship, or field experience, description will incorporate the needs of your organization as well as the abilities and academic goals of the students you employ.

KEY POINTS

- Describe challenging, but realistic tasks students can accomplish within a three-month period.
- If necessary, work with faculty to establish specific learning objectives for students.
- Identify outcomes or expected products.
- Be willing to incorporate the students' particular strengths.
- Show how this work relates to the overall efforts of the department or organization.

SUPERVISING THE INTERN

As an intern supervisor, you use all the skills necessary in any effective supervisory relationship:

- Providing leadership
- Motivating
- Delegating
- Communicating
- Developing and training
- Evaluating

Additionally, the students will look to you as a mentor who will assist their transition from the classroom to the work environment. Since the internship is an extension of the learning process, you will need to provide opportunities to bridge the two experiences.

We suggest that you meet with your interns regularly to provide feedback concerning their performance. During these meetings, the students can:

- report on the status of a project ask questions
- learn how their work is contributing to the organization
- participate in an evaluation of their strengths
- discuss areas needing growth and development
- get a sense of what kind of work lies ahead

At the same time you will have an opportunity to coach, counsel and reinforce positive attitudes and performance.

If the student is receiving credit through the school, you should anticipate that you may have some interaction with your students' internship coordinator through telephone calls, on-site visits, and written evaluations. Such persons will help you find a solution if difficulties occur (intern attendance or punctuality problems, low motivation, unsatisfactory work, or personal conflicts).

Encourage your interns to keep a portfolio of work accomplished during the experience. This will help fulfill the students' academic requirements and provide them with a sense of accomplishment. In addition, it will give you a basis to discuss their professional growth.

Specific work documents to include in a portfolio might be any of the following:

- Job Descriptions
- Company Newsletters
- Financial Reports
- Legislation
- Performance Appraisals
- Displays & Exhibits
- Proposals
- Charts/Graphs
- References
- Manuals
- Correspondence
- Survey
- Reports
- Citations & Awards
- Press Releases
- Cost Analyses
- Contracts
- Certificates
- Computer Print-outs
- Program Outlines
- Research Report

In addition to spontaneous and informal meetings, you should evaluate your interns' performance at the midpoint of the internship, so the students know where they stand. You should consider the quality and timeliness of the work produced to date, ability to take and follow direction, work habits, and areas needing growth and development. This information will also provide data for the final evaluation and serve as a reference point for the students' subsequent performance.

KEY POINTS

- Maintain an open channel of communication with formal and informal meetings.
- Keep the interns busy and directed towards their learning objectives. Students rarely complain of overwork, but they do complain if they are not challenged.
- Provide opportunities for increasing responsibility.
- Encourage professionalism by assisting the interns in developing human relations skills, decision-making abilities, and managing office politics.
- Remember that you are a role model.
- Develop connections.

INTERN ASSESSMENT FORM

Intern's Name: _____

Name of Company: _____

Supervisor: _____ Date: _____

Intern's Position or Assignment: _____

PART I Please complete this evaluation at the end of the student's work period. You are encouraged to discuss the completed form with the intern to aid in their professional development. The evaluation is a mechanism that the Faculty has employed to inform its continuous improvement program, therefore it is not confidential. Please use the scale below to evaluate your intern's performance in the following areas:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Needs more training or education	Performing below expectations	Acceptable performance	Above average performance	Superior performance	Not observed

1 General Workplace Performance

Attendance	1	2	3	4	5	6
Punctuality	1	2	3	4	5	6
Appropriate dress	1	2	3	4	5	6
Attitude	1	2	3	4	5	6
Acceptance of criticism	1	2	3	4	5	6
Asks appropriate questions	1	2	3	4	5	6
Self-motivated	1	2	3	4	5	6
Practices ethical behavior	1	2	3	4	5	6

2 Specific Job Assignment Performance

Sufficient knowledge to perform tasks	1	2	3	4	5	6
Verbal communication skills	1	2	3	4	5	6
Written communication skills	1	2	3	4	5	6
Analytical skills – analyses problems and takes appropriate action	1	2	3	4	5	6
Uses technical skills required for the position	1	2	3	4	5	6
Meets deadlines	1	2	3	4	5	6
Takes initiative to get a job done, including overcoming obstacles	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sets priorities	1	2	3	4	5	6

How would you assess the intern's overall performance?

outstanding above average satisfactory below average
unsatisfactory

INTERN ASSESSMENT FORM

PART II

This section gives you the opportunity, as an experienced professional, to make recommendations that would help in the professional development of the student as well as give the Faculty some insight into the areas that may need more attention.

What do you consider the major strengths of this intern?

What areas need improvement?

What would you recommend to make this student better prepared for the workplace? (e.g. courses, activities, skills acquisition, programs)?

Other comments, commendations, or recommendations:
