

How to develop a successful internship program

Research shows that connecting college students to meaningful internship opportunities with local employers heightens the chance that they will stay in that community after graduation. Moreover, employers are increasingly requiring "prior experience" of applicants for entry level positions. Fortunately, employers also report that a *meaningful* internship during college will satisfy prior experience.

A *meaningful* internship...

- **Offers relevant experience in the student's chosen field.** An internship should prepare students for a position in a particular field. Students may perform some routine or clerical duties, but their responsibilities must be largely career-related. For example, if an accounting office has a position that involves nothing more than answering the phone, making copies, filing and running errands, it does not qualify as a meaningful internship. But if students are also provided projects that involve accounting, reconciling, financial reporting or processing-related paperwork, then it becomes a learning experience related to their field, and would qualify as an internship.
- **Encourages the intern to initiate projects,** ask questions, absorb information, and provide feedback as part of their learning experience. (Even if "regular" employees are not encouraged to do this in your organization.)
- **Create an internship job description that is structured to simulate an actual job.** The position should include a substantial level of responsibility with duties, requirements and benefits clearly stated and agreed upon.
- **Assigns an employee-mentor to the intern.** Rather than just handing the student a list of things to do, structure the experience so the student interacts on a regular basis with someone who has experience in the student's intended field. This interaction should include instruction, guidance, and advice. In addition, if the student receives academic credit, some academic departments may have specific learning objectives or other criteria that must be met.
- **Considers assigning a large project as a part of the internship experience.** Assist the intern with identifying a real-world problem that impacts business, then allow the intern time to conduct research and develop a business case and propose solutions to address the issue. At the end of the internship, have the intern make a formal presentation to executives and others who may be interested in the findings.
- **Involves the intern in meetings, lunches and other gatherings** to help the intern feel comfortable in the work environment and a part of the team. As appropriate, invite the intern to internal and external meetings so the intern can experience that side of personal interaction side business. Also include the intern in work-related social activities.
- **Introduces the intern to your business contacts.** After all, in business, it's all about who you know. Help the intern begin to gain access to individuals who can help the intern learn and grow, as well as to build the intern's professional network.

In addition, when establishing your internship program, you should do the following:

- **Create a formal internship description that simulates an actual job.** The position should include a substantial level of responsibility with duties, requirements and benefits clearly stated and agreed upon.
- **Define clear beginning and end dates,** usually one semester with the option of continuing for additional semesters. Allow students to work a significant amount of time (10-20 hours/ week), but with consideration for the student's class schedule.
- **Establish in writing an agreement between the organization and the intern** regarding expectations, responsibilities, evaluation, resources, learning goals, supervision, work schedule, duration and wage. A copy should be provided to the intern.

Source: Capital University Career Services