

INTERNSHIP BEST PRACTICES

Good internships don't just happen. Quality internships are excellent learning experiences facilitated by supervisors/mentors that plan the internship and support it with resources. Best practices are extremely important and are the responsibility of the internship provider. These best practices need to be in place from the start of the internship and sustained until the end of the internship.

The main priority of the internship experience is to provide the student with a professional learning experience, which should consist of both formal training and on-the-job learning experiences.

Below is a checklist of best practices suggested by the Charlton College of Business (CCB). Prospective internship providers should review this list as they plan for a new internship experience.

- Successful internship experiences combine training with the assignment and execution of on-the-job tasks.
 - The best internships involve the completion of purposeful project assignments. Preparing a preliminary list of potential projects that will help the student learn and help the company achieve important goals is a very good start. Interns need focused, purposeful roles to keep them motivated, learning, and helping to meet organizational objectives.
 - The best internships provide focused learning opportunities and also show the big picture through company tours, job shadowing, field trips, and attendance at company training seminars.
 - Jobs that merely require the student to perform clerical or routine tasks should not be considered as internships and will not be approved for credit by the Charlton College of Business.
- The intern should be working "onsite" in a professional setting with frequent interaction with supervisor/mentor.
 - There should be many opportunities for instant communication and feedback from an experienced professional. Other students should not supervise interns. The mentor/supervisor must serve as an information source and assure that interns are keeping pace and accomplishing goals.
 - There should be many opportunities to build personal relationships and networks during the course of the internship. We (CCB) want our students to "get out there," meet people and learn from others in the field.
 - Opportunity to experience working in a professional environment: We want our student interns to experience what it is like to work in a

professional office, retail location, manufacturing facility, studio, etc.

The lessons learned from working in a professional environment cannot be learned from an engagement that is done from one's dorm room, home, or from a coffee shop. Internships that are mostly telecommuting opportunities should not be approved for internship credit by the Charlton College of Business.

- There should be opportunity for direct contact and more personal interaction with supervisors, mentors, employees and other interns.
 - The supervisor/mentor should serve as a positive role model while putting a heavy emphasis on teaching and supporting the intern throughout the entire experience. Helping the intern to:
 - Learn about the business/agency
 - Learn about career paths
 - See possibilities of someday transitioning into the workplace with a full-time position
 - Find answers to questions about projects and processes
- The internship provider should "invest" in the intern. The investment can take a variety of forms (including money, tangible resources and time):
- The investment can be a direct financial one. Reasonable compensation (not required but certainly allowed and encouraged by CCB) or a stipend to help with the cost of the summer internship course are encouraged. Many CCB students are helping to pay for their education and therefore welcome an opportunity to "earn and learn." They also bring value to an organization with their energy and new ideas and perspective. CCB strongly encourages paid internships, but students can earn credit from both paid and unpaid internships.

Paying an intern a wage or stipend creates ownership in the program by both the business/agency and the intern. Unpaid interns are often looked upon as volunteers— a perception that can impact the learning experience from both the company and student point of view. Paid internship postings also produce a better pool of intern candidates. However, many nonprofit organizations are prohibited by policy from paying interns so quality unpaid internships are possible, but adhere to U.S. Labor laws. Employers may want to refer to the Fair Labor Standards Act as to the definitions of an intern and the rules regarding compensation as spelled out by the U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division.

- A good space to work is critical. Space is a critical resource and although some organizations have space limitations, interns need a good place to work (as do all professionals). Consideration needs to be given to providing an adequate place to work within an internship provider's facilities.
- Well-thought-out orientation programs help the student meet people, learn more about the company/agency etc. and become comfortable with the environment and clear on management expectations, including business etiquette and policies and procedures. Orientation programs can address such topics as:
 - Handbook or policy/procedure manual
 - How the organization started
 - Mission, services, products, etc.
 - Organization's current objectives or focus

- Intern job description
 - Work schedule including start times, end times, break times, etc.
 - Email, mail, Internet, and telephone system and mail, email, and internet telephone etiquette
 - Cell phone and texting policy
 - Facebook, Twitter, and other social media policy
 - Confidentiality
 - Security issues
 - Introductions to key personnel
 - Tours
 - Periodic workshops and other formal training opportunities should be planned by the supervisor when possible. On-the-job training with close supervision from an experienced mentor is the best "training" but that certainly can be supplemented with more formalized training including structured self-study courses or modules, web-based education and workshops.
 - An investment in time is another key commitment for a successful internship. Students who are earning credit in an internship need to have the internship for the semester. The internship provider needs to commit to this from the start (at least 135 hours and preferably a semester-long experience.) On average, interns work 10-15 hours per week—an optimal number of hours in conjunction with their full-time load of course work. In addition, the intern supervisor/mentor needs to make time for the intern to assign tasks and projects, explain policies and procedures that will guide work. They also need to understand the goals, skills, and areas of interest of the intern.
 - A proper work environment and "tools" are critical success factors of a quality internship.
 - Adequate work area (cubicle and desk, office and desk etc., or some other acceptable work area)
 - Adequate resources to perform tasks and to learn including a computer, software, office supplies, and telephone.
- The supervisor/mentor should develop a company/agency "internship curriculum." The curriculum should be a well thought out plan of learning that could include the following:
- Review of a written job description. There should be a detailed job description for the intern before the intern starts on the job, and on the first day of the internship the intern should review the job description with the supervisor. The assumption should be that the student's duties will not change drastically during the course of the internship and if they do, it will be to the student's benefit (i.e., more responsibility for better learning experience). Having a set of well-defined responsibilities focuses the learning and gives the student a better chance of achieving critical learning objectives.
 - Expectations and orientation information such as policies, procedures, etiquettes etc. should be discussed with the intern.
 - Some internship providers create a handbook just for the intern that helps orient them to the company and set expectations.
 - Before the intern begins on the job, the supervisor should make a list of projects to be worked on during the course of the semester and have a clear idea of what the intern will work on when not working on specific projects.
 - There should be clear personal objectives for the student intern. This is shared responsibility—the internship provider /supervisor should help facilitate the setting of these objectives and the accomplishment of them during the semester. Each student intern should customize goals and put them in writing, in consultation with the supervisor, to meet their own specific needs and desired career path exploration, but should also consider generic internship goals that apply to all internships:

- Applying business theory to actual working situations
 - Gaining new knowledge by performing tasks, working on projects, and completing other on-the-job learning experiences related to a business discipline
 - Gaining a greater degree of self-direction in the learning process
 - Testing a tentative career choice
- Supervisors/mentors should teach lessons beyond technical knowledge. In addition to learning new technical skills and knowledge via an internship and relating classroom lessons to real world/workplace issues, the best internship experiences help the student learn to practice persistence, solve problems, exhibit a positive-attitude, become more productive, hone their people and networking skills, plan, and prioritize. Internship supervisors should consider ways to help students become good problem solvers and planners while nurturing their people skills.
- Good internships strike a balance between value-added activities and an enjoyable experience for the student. Internships should be primarily hard work and learning, but there should also be fun and enjoyment for the intern. Social activities that combine business and fun are good opportunities for intern growth. Business after-hour events at the local Chamber of Commerce and company sponsored lunches, dinners, and even volunteering events offer students the opportunity to network with others and develop people skills.
- Quality internships have clear expectations from the start as to hours of work that meet the needs of the student and the company. Agreement on a work schedule that works for the internship provider and the student is another critical success factor of good internships. Interns are college students and they must balance school and work when participating in an internship. Most internships require between 10-15 hours per week as students are also keeping up with a full-load course schedule. Punctuality and engagement along with good business manners and etiquette should be stressed throughout the internship.
- The internship should avoid all conflicts of interest that can diminish the learning experience. The Charlton College of Business does not allow interns to work in a business owned by a member of their family, and being supervised by an immediate member of the family (i.e., father, mother, sibling) is prohibited.
- There should be an exit interview (initiated by the supervisor) with the intern at the conclusion of the experience. Our internship course requires that the intern do three final things which can all be reviewed by the supervisor at the exit interview:
- Submit a 10 page term paper that documents the internship experience
 - Get a signed confirmation letter regarding the number of hours worked (at least 135 hours)
 - The supervisor must complete a performance evaluation.

Although not required, intern supervisors should request a copy of the student's term paper prior to the exit interview and use the opportunity of this final meeting to discuss the paper and talk about the student's future. The paper helps document the internship experience and is submitted as part of the internship course requirements.

Some internship providers offer permanent positions to interns, but if that is not the case, the exit interview is a good chance to discuss such topics as future job references (letters of reference or references on applications), staying in touch, and other possible mentoring opportunities either at the company or in the industry.

The exit interview can also allow the internship provider to gather information that might help design a better internship experience in the future. Suggested questions at the exit interview might include:

- What can we do to improve our internship program?
- Were the projects and tasks relevant to your major?
- Did you understand what was expected of you?
- Did you have enough access to your supervisor/mentor?
- What did you like most? Dislike most?

For more information on the Charlton College of Business Internship program, visit:

<http://www.umassd.edu/charlton/internship/>