

COLLEGE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS
ACADEMIC INTERNSHIPS BEST PRACTICES

SUMMARY

An internship experience provides students an opportunity to enrich their academic experience at Penn State while working alongside professionals in a field of their interest. While many students have positive experiences, we want to do everything we can to ensure that students have the opportunity to connect their professional internship back to their academic preparation.

This document provides some suggestions for how to develop and oversee an academic internship that effectively integrates the professional and educational experience. We include tips on how to construct an internship syllabus that makes students integrate their academic and professional training and tips on how to work with employers to promote a positive learning experience for students. No two internship experiences are the same, so we only provide some general guidelines.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers¹ (NACE) notes that colleges and employers both share a goal of “achieving the best match between the individual student and the employing organization.” We hope that these guidelines can help to achieve that goal for our students and cooperating employers.

STUDENTS

Many departments in the college have developed syllabi for students earning academic credit through their internship. Students may also enroll in a general LA 495 course offered by the college. We believe that the syllabus can serve as a useful tool for maximizing learning outcomes for interns. As the Center for Innovation in Teaching & Learning at the University of Illinois² states, the syllabus should serve three major purposes:

1. a contract,
2. a permanent record, and
3. a learning tool.

Finally, the syllabus can serve as a recruitment tool.

SYLLABUS AS CONTRACT

It is important that course expectations and requirements are communicated clearly with the students. A syllabus that clearly and precisely states the policy serves to inform the student *and* protect the instructor in the event they are challenged by a student about credits or registration. This also gives the instructor leverage for grading. We recommend that instructors include the following on their syllabus:

Explanation of credits: In compliance with **Faculty Senate Policy 42-23**, the minimum expected workload (in clock hours) for each credit hour is:

Number of Credits	Number of Work Hours
1	40
2	80
3	120

¹ <http://naceweb.org/knowledge/legal/faculty-guide-student-hiring.aspx>

² <http://cte.illinois.edu/resources/topics/syllabus/purpose.html>

Some academic departments may require additional work hours beyond the minimum required by the policy, while some interns will work many more hours than the required minimum and not want to earn the corresponding number of credits. The minimum number of hours of work per credit required should be clearly communicated to the student, as well as the maximum number of credits a student can earn for their internship experience.

It is strongly recommended that students consult with academic advisers to determine exactly how internship credits will meet specific degree requirements.

Registration and eligibility: University policy (Senate policy 34-81³) mandates that students must register for the internship credits in the semester during which students are completing the internship. Internships can only be credited to degree-seeking, current Penn State students in good academic standing (cumulative GPA of 2.0 or above).

Clear and precise course expectations: These include a plan of assessment, grading scale, and a calendar with assignments and due dates. Each department will make decisions regarding the minimum length of an internship assignment, while keeping in mind the overall academic goals and objectives of the course.

SYLLABUS AS PERMANENT RECORD

The syllabus should be a valuable tool for documentation and accountability, clearly communicating what is expected of students. This can be useful for students in the event of transferring credits or determining course equivalency.

We recommend that instructors include the following on their syllabus:

- Learning objectives linked to professional standards
- Name, title, and rank of instructors
- Description of assessment procedures
- Required texts and other materials

SYLLABUS AS A LEARNING TOOL

An internship gives students one of the best opportunities to connect their coursework to real-world applications. These connections can be lost without thoughtful assignments that push the student to reflect on their training.

We recommend that the instructors include the following in their syllabus:

- Frequent and directed assignments that require thoughtful reflection
- At least one, but preferably multiple, evaluations from supervisor(s).

SYLLABUS AS A RECRUITMENT TOOL

We often find that students have remarkable experiences in their internships. In many cases, these internships lead to students securing employment with that company. For others, students either confirm they are in the right field or find a new career pathway. Regardless, we want students to have an opportunity to share their experiences with others in a public forum.

The Career Enrichment Network documents many of the student experiences on its website in the form of **student profiles**.⁴ We direct students to these stories or put them directly in contact with previous interns so that they can learn more about the experience. We have also found that adding an online component (e.g. blogging) to the course has led to fruitful discourse amongst other interns. These blogs have also become valuable resources for other

³ <http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/>

⁴ <http://www.la.psu.edu/current-students/cen/studentprofiles>

students interested in the internship process. We have linked to **Dr. Miraldi's CAS syllabus** as an example of ways to use **blog posts in the internship process**.⁵

EMPLOYERS

Penn State students in the College of the Liberal Arts complete hundreds of internships each academic year. While it is impossible to make contact with and develop specific guidelines for each employer, we have provided some suggestions that can and should apply to most employers.

We suggest that programs do their due diligence to follow up with employers and interns to make sure the internship experience met both parties' expectations. On the student end, much of this can be accomplished by designing a syllabus that requires frequent contact and feedback.

As for working with employers, we recommend that employers are supplied with resources and suggestions from the school. When possible, site visits can be especially fruitful. We recommend that faculty take opportunities to make site visits to employers that are hosting interns, since these visits are important for reinforcing the academic validity of the program. Meanwhile, during a site visit, one may find additional opportunities for internships at the company. Some institutions have specific site visit checklists that include items such as:

- Was the student on-site during the visit? Was the student's supervisor on-site?
- Does the student have his/her own workspace? Computer? Supplies and tools necessary to perform her/his job?
- Does that student's work assignments correlate with his/her learning goals?
- Has the student communicated with his/her supervisor about goals for the internship experience?
- Is the internship going according to the position description, or have there been changes? If changes, what are they and how did they occur?
- What projects is the student currently working on? Will there be an opportunity to see a project through from beginning to end?
- Is the student utilizing skills learned in the classroom?
- Is the student challenged by the work assignments?
- Is the site supervisor interested in working with another intern in the future? What is the application process? Are there opportunities at this site for a variety of majors/academic backgrounds?

As NACE notes, by completing site visits, "you will build a better working relationship with these groups, which can lead to more student referrals, enhanced campus visibility, and increased flexibility on their parts when your business needs dictate it."⁶

For an employer's perspective on developing a quality internship, you can direct employers to **this interview with Christi Pedra from Siemens Healthcare**.⁷

Pedra advises that companies follow these guidelines to create mutually beneficial internships:

- Develop a plan for a structured internship experience – if the company has multiple interns, encourage interaction across institutional and departmental boundaries.
- Give interns significant, goals-focused assignments – have assignments that are geared towards the intern's experience and expertise.

⁵ <http://cas.la.psu.edu/undergraduate/enrichment/internships-cocurricular/internships-1/requirements/syllabus/view>

⁶ <http://www.naceweb.org/internships/15-best-practices.aspx#sthash.7RyiSWVN.dpuf>

⁷ <http://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/making-most-out-internships-interview-christi-m-pedra-senior-vice>

- Provide interns a platform to demonstrate their learning – give the interns an opportunity to synthesize their experience in a presentation or demonstration for employees, executives, and other interns.
- Help interns describe their experience – help interns to reflect on their experience and to articulate their experience in the form of cover letters and resumes.

The Career Enrichment Network website also provides **similar guidelines for employers interested in developing a new internship program**. Internship instructors may find these guidelines useful to keep in mind as they are discussing possible internship opportunities with employers.

Non-profits and government agencies are not required to provide compensation to interns. In those cases, students are strongly encouraged to apply for **Liberal Arts enrichment funds** to support their experiences.

For-profit organizations should be encouraged to consult the U.S. Department of Labor Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) to help determine whether their interns must be paid at least minimum wage for the services they provide to their employer. **Basic guidelines for unpaid internships** with a link to the **FSLA** are provided on the Career Enrichment Network website.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) website provides a number of resources and guidelines for employers and universities related to internships and career services. Some resources are for members-only, and the Career Enrichment Network maintains a membership and can provide access to any NACE resources. The **Internships: Best Practices section** of the site may be of particular interest.

InternQube.com, an on-line resource focused on helping students to develop professional skills for the workplace, provides internship search engines, links to on-line career and job resources, along with suggested books, videos, and articles. The creator, Mike True, also has a book version of the site that could be used as a text for an internship course. As you can see from his syllabus, Dr. Miraldi has incorporated readings from the book into his LA 495 course sections and used them as prompts for students' blog posts. The book comes in hard cover and e-reader versions at a reasonable cost. Hard copies are available in the Career Enrichment Network for any instructors or students who would like to review or borrow a copy.

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