

Internship Guidelines

Internship Philosophy

The faculty of the Communications program at Penn State Harrisburg believe that successful internships complement a student's academic career and serve as valuable opportunities for exposure to the professional world. With an ever-increasing emphasis upon professional competency in the workplace, the Communications program recognizes the potential long-term career benefits to be gained in an internship experience.

Internships provide a brief exposure to practical real world experiences associated with specific career paths, as well as introducing students to professionals who may be helpful when finding a job after graduation. Of course, an internship experience may not be for everyone. Some students may find more personal satisfaction through direct interaction with a faculty member while working for credit on an independent study or research project. It is our goal as faculty to advise students of their options, and, if they so chose, to help them prepare for, secure, and successfully complete an internship.

What is an internship?

An internship is an opportunity for students to experience the daily operations associated with a professional position while earning academic credit. Internships provide hands-on work allowing you to develop your proficiencies and apply your academic knowledge. Internships are different from short-term jobs or volunteer work because they include intentional learning objectives. An intern is a student-observer and an active participant under supervision in a professional setting.

Why is an internship important?

The real world job experience will help you chart your career path. It will expose you to the various intellectual, ethical, social and creative attributes and skills necessary to be successful in the various jobs, and will help you prepare for the job hunt after graduation. You will find out what skills you have and what skills you need while you still have the resources of the University to improve yourself. Many employers consider the internship experience as a valuable asset on the resumes of prospective employees. The contacts that are made at internship sites often prove useful to find work after graduation.

Internships also give you an opportunity for further self-discovery. The internship provides instances in which you see what significant and creative strengths you have as both a person and as a professional communicator. You might also encounter moments that expose weaknesses requiring introspection and personal improvement. An understanding of these positive and negative qualities in advance of a vigorous job search will help hone your professional competitive edge.

What does an internship involve?

Depending on the amount of credits you are seeking to fulfill, you will work different amounts. We require that you work about 120 hours total for 3 credits and about 240 hours total for 6 credits. These hours should be spread over a semester, or over at least 10 weeks. You may decide to do two 3-credit internships at different locations to broaden your range of experience.

During your internship, you will maintain a journal or internship diary documenting and reflecting on what you observed, produced, and/or accomplished each day you participate as

an intern. A copy of your journal entries as well as an accurate time log of your hours worked per day/per week, will be turned in to your internship faculty adviser according to his/her instructions, but no less than three times during the course of the semester. You will be required to contact (personally, e-mail, telephone) your faculty adviser every two weeks. There will be a mandatory feedback meeting of all Communications interns around the middle of the semester. Finally, a comprehensive paper and portfolio/project from your internship experience will be due at the end of the semester. Your internship faculty adviser will coordinate all assignments and meetings with you before you start your internship event. Your site supervisor will evaluate your performance and should discuss the evaluation with you. This evaluation will be summarized in a written form to and sent to the faculty supervisor at the end of the internship.

Who is eligible for an Internship?

Prospective internship candidates must have four things before they can register (either on-line/telephone, or in person) for an internship:

- 1) You must have completed at least 78 credits;
- 2) You need proof of a minimum overall GPA of 2.5 at the time of your internship application;
- 3) You need permission from an internship faculty supervisor, the Communications Program Coordinator, and the Director of the School of Humanities; and
- 4) You need a verified and approved internship site selection.

These criteria will be addressed in the “Internship Approval Form” which your internship faculty supervisor will complete in advance of course registration. Therefore, it is advisable that you find your potential faculty supervisor before you proceed with any further consideration of an internship. See your assigned academic adviser for ideas about which faculty member might be best suited to supervise your particular internship. Under no circumstances will any internship proceed or be granted credit until you have met all four criteria.

How do you prepare and plan for an internship?

Maintain good grades. From a practical perspective, keep in mind an internship may open doors for your career. Try to identify your career interests. Discuss your goals, interests, and career ideas with your academic adviser. Develop a list of the knowledge areas, skills, and abilities you believe you will need to be successful in your career area after graduation. Identify the areas where you need improvement. Finally, take required courses in your major as soon as possible.

The sooner you begin planning for an internship, the better prepared you will be academically, intellectually, and practically to meet the needs of the internship organization. For successful application to some of the more desirable internship sites, it is good to have a general knowledge of what goes on within the profession of your potential site as well as a basic understanding of their unique terminologies. This information will come, in part, from your course work. If you are applying to a news media outlet, such as a newspaper or television station, take the time to familiarize yourself with the news products that the outlet produces (that is, read their newspapers or watch their news programs).

How do you find an Internship site?

Where you participate in your internship depends upon your interests. Your academic adviser may suggest locations where Penn State has previously placed interns. You may also check the internship site catalogs located in the Humanities office (W-356 Olmsted). You may already know of a site that interests you. If you want to work at such a site, simply call the organization and find out how to apply. Be creative in the search and selection process, but do not wait. Competition is keen for the more desirable locations. The goal, of course, is to apply to organizations where you can get the best experience for your future career.

It is a good idea to prepare a professional resume and a well-written application letter listing your skills, interests and accomplishments. Also, you will be more successful if you include letters of recommendation from former professors and work supervisors.

How do you become eligible for an internship?

First, inform your academic adviser of the type of internship where you would like to work. With your adviser's guidance, select and contact a potential faculty internship adviser. If he/she agrees to work with you, he/she will check your academic eligibility through the completion of an "Internship Approval Form." After the internship adviser approves and signs your internship application, you will make initial contacts with your chosen organization(s) through either electronic communication, or by sending a formal cover letter and resume.

You should interview with at least three potential internship sites no later than eight weeks prior to the semester in which you plan to do your internship. For example:

- For a FALL INTERNSHIP interviews should be undertaken by June 15.
- For a SPRING INTERNSHIP interviews should be undertaken by October 15.
- For a SUMMER INTERNSHIP interviews should be undertaken by March 15.

As mentioned, the sites can come from the Communications program list of sites, or they could potentially be one of your own choosing (contingent upon approval of your adviser). Following your series of interviews you should discuss the relative merits and shortcomings of each potential internship site.

After your selection by a site and your acceptance of their offer, your faculty adviser will officially confirm the acceptance with a letter to you and to your organization's site supervisor. The letter will detail your work requirements and start/end dates, as well as the number of hours you will work per week, and the amount of credit you will be receiving. Upon formal acknowledgment from you faculty internship adviser, you may then AND ONLY THEN register for the Communications Internship (COMM 495)

What if the internship doesn't work for me?

The old adage has merit here. You only get out of the internship experience what effort you put into it. Your internship experience is an educational time of exploration and discovery; not a replacement for paid staff or free temporary help on the job. While there are some paid internships, generally you should not expect to be paid for your performance. You are there to learn all you can about the job and to ask questions about your prospective profession.

The on-site supervisor should not ask you to do anything a paid staff person would not do. You are urged to discuss all internship-related problems with your on-site supervisor and your faculty internship adviser, who may terminate the internship relationship with the organization if the internship tasks are inappropriate/unethical or not providing a productive learning experience.

Internship checklist

Please follow these steps:

Before starting an internship:

- o Read the internship requirements on the previous pages.
- o Confirm your academic eligibility for an internship (overall GPA at least 2.5 and at least 78 credits completed).
- o Make a list of the educational objectives you wish to achieve in an internship.
- o Make an appointment to discuss your internship educational objectives with your faculty academic adviser, who will also suggest an appropriate faculty internship adviser.
- o Ask that faculty member to advise your internship. Once you have a faculty member who agrees to advise your internship, that faculty member will begin the necessary paperwork.
- o You need to find an internship site that is willing to accept you as an intern and that meets your educational objectives.
- o Let your potential internship site supervisor know about your educational objectives. Negotiate your work duties, and the number of hours per week and dates you will work.
- o Ask your internship site supervisor to write a letter on company letterhead to your faculty adviser confirming their acceptance of you as an intern and outlining your proposed duties and objectives and the number of hours and the dates you will work.
- o After you receive a letter from your faculty internship adviser giving you formal approval of your internship, register for the class, COMM 495.

During your internship:

- o Keep a daily journal, reflecting on the work you have done and progress toward your educational objectives. Also, keep track of your hours worked.
- o Gather materials for a portfolio showing examples of the work you produced during the internship.
- o Meet often with your site supervisor, to get feedback, ask questions, discuss problems, success, progress, etc. Remember, if you are bored, confused, frustrated or whatever, you need to let your site supervisor know.
- o Meet at least twice during the internship with your faculty internship adviser, and regularly e-mail or deliver journal entry updates to your faculty internship adviser.

At the conclusion of your internship:

- o Your internship site supervisor should evaluate your work and learning performance. Ask them to write a summary of their evaluation on company letterhead and send it to your faculty internship adviser via mail or fax.
- o Meet with your faculty internship adviser to discuss your experience and to deliver your completed journal, a portfolio with examples of the work you did, and a final written report (usually about five pages, double-spaced), discussing your internship experience.