

DEVELOPING AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM AT YOUR ORGANIZATION

Overview

What is an Internship?
How Do Internships Benefit Employers?
Internships at Nebraska Wesleyan University
What Makes an Experience an Internship?
Are You Ready for an Intern?
Do I Need to Pay the Intern?
How Much Do I Pay the Intern?
Utilize InternNE
Internships: Credit vs. Non-Credit
Marketing Your Internship
Orientation Checklist: Onboarding the Intern

OVERVIEW

This guide will provide the necessary information to help you to create an internship program that adequately meets the needs of all parties involved: your organization, the student, and Nebraska Wesleyan University. The guide will help you to determine if and how a student could benefit from participating in an internship at your organization and how your organization could benefit from the knowledge and talent of a student-intern. It includes information about creating an internship position description, evaluating and selecting candidates, the responsibilities frequently carried out by interns, and a checklist of activities that should be completed during the early stages of the internship. These materials are meant to serve as a point of reference while developing an internship program at your organization.

WHAT IS AN INTERNSHIP?

Depending on whom you speak with—students, higher education faculty and staff, or employers—the word “internship” may evoke a variety of definitions. Since developing a quality internship program at your organization is the focus of this guide, it is important that we share the same definition of the word. To establish uniformity in the use and application of the term “internship,” we will use the [definition created by the National Association of Colleges and Employers \(NACE\)](#) as our guide:

An internship is “a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Internships provide students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience, develop social capital, explore career fields, and make connections in professional fields. In addition, internships serve as a significant recruiting mechanism for employers, providing them with the opportunity to guide and evaluate potential candidates.”

To effectively implement this definition, guidelines have been developed by NACE and the U.S. Department of Labor to help ensure employers that they are providing a legitimate internship experience. Throughout this guide we will discuss these guidelines and criteria that will help you to shape your internship program.

HOW DO INTERNSHIPS BENEFIT EMPLOYERS?

An internship program at your organization may provide:

- A year-round source of motivated pre-professionals.
- Good candidates to support temporary, seasonal, or busy positions and projects.
- A method of identifying and training potential future employees.
- Students that bring new ideas, skills, and points of view to old and new problems.
- Well-prepared, short-term assistance to support current employees so they can pursue higher projects.
- Visibility of your company on campus and brand advocates.
- An opportunity for supervisory experience to current staff members.
- Increased diversity.
- An opportunity to fulfill a civic and professional responsibility by providing young professionals with real work experience.

INTERNSHIPS AT NEBRASKA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

The Basics

Students at NWU are encouraged to participate in numerous experiential learning activities such as internships. To support the University's value of experiential learning, students have a variety of options when it comes to participating in an internship. The internship may:

- Be completed for academic credit or not for credit.
- Be paid or unpaid (more about this under "Do I Need to Pay the Intern?").
- Occur any time during the year. Note: Fall internships typically run from the end of August/beginning of September through the beginning of December. Spring internships typically run from the middle/end of January through late April/early May. Summer internships typically run during the break between the spring and fall semesters. Other start and end dates may be arranged if agreed upon by the student, organization, and, if done for credit, the student's academic department.
- Full-time or part-time hours (to be determined by the student and their supervisor). Students completing an internship for academic credit typically complete 45 hours per credit earned. Minimum-hour requirements exist by academic department. Non-credit internships have no minimum-hour requirement.
- Internships normally run the course of one semester, about 16 weeks in the fall and spring and 12 weeks during the summer. This may vary depending on the needs of the student and the organization, and the requirements set forth by the student's academic department.

Each Step Matters

Regardless of the logistics of the internship, please keep in mind that the entire application and internship process is important for students' personal and professional development. It is important that they engage in an internship search, identify opportunities that support their career goals, develop their resume to apply to positions, communicate with potential employers through various means of communication, participate in interviews, and be properly introduced to their new internship site through an onboarding process. The materials in this guide will help you to prepare for each of these steps, from writing the internship description to orienting the intern to your organization.

Supervisors

In all internships it is critical that there be at least one person serving as a supervisor to the student throughout the entire experience. This person should be a professional in the field in which the student is interning. The supervisor's role is to help acclimate the student to the organization, assign projects and responsibilities, and answer the intern's questions related to the position and the career field. It is important to remember that while the student is providing real work assistance to the organization, the internship is meant to be a learning experience for the student, and they should have sufficient guidance and supervision through the duration of the internship. Supervisors are encouraged to engage their intern in a variety of activities and projects, learning experiences, and networking events while providing mentorship and feedback throughout the experience.

WHAT MAKES AN EXPERIENCE AN INTERNSHIP?

Guidelines and requirements for the internship will vary depending on whether the experience is being completed for academic credit. If it is for credit, requirements will vary among academic departments.

Regardless of whether or not the student intends to complete the internship for academic credit, there are certain criteria that all experiences should meet to be considered a legitimate internship. The following criteria were developed by the National Association for Colleges and Employers:

1. The experience must be an extension of the classroom. It must not be simply to advance the operations of the employer or be the work that a regular employee would routinely perform. The position must allow the student to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to real work issues.
2. The skills or knowledge learned in the internship must be transferable to other employment settings. The intern should not be learning skills that can only be used at your organization.
3. There are clearly defined learning objectives/goals related to the professional goals of the student's academic coursework. An internship supervisor may choose to create their own learning objectives for the position, but they should also be ready and willing to work with the intern to identify their own personal and professional goals for the experience. Learning objectives for credited internships are typically agreed upon by the student, faculty, and employer.
4. There is supervision by a professional with expertise and educational and/or professional background in the field of the experience. There is routine feedback by the experienced supervisor. The supervisor must be accessible to the intern throughout the duration of the internship. The supervisor should be accessible in person or by phone/email/virtual communication to assign tasks, answer questions, and provide constructive feedback on the intern's performance. This person should serve as a mentor and provide guidance to the intern during the internship, offering feedback on tasks/roles they performed well and on areas of improvement.
5. There are resources, equipment, and facilities provided by the host employer that support learning objectives/goals. An intern should be provided with a space to work and should not be expected to provide their own work materials, including a computer/printer, software/hardware, design materials, etc.
6. The experience has a defined beginning and end, and a job description with desired qualifications.

ARE YOU READY FOR AN INTERN?

The questions below are designed to help you determine if your company is prepared to manage an internship program, how your organization can benefit from having an intern, and how a student-intern would benefit from working with your organization. These questions do not require a formal response; however, it is recommended that you think about the answers to these questions to find if you are prepared to bring on an intern. You may also find that the answers provide a foundation for creating the internship position description.

1. How do you see your company benefitting from hosting an intern? Would your organization benefit from the work of interns to write, research, identify business leads, work with clients, or provide overall organization or program support?
2. What are the goals of your organization's internship program? Do you need assistance completing a particular project? Are you supplementing staffing needs (though not using an intern as a replacement for a permanent employee)? Do you hope to use the program as a pipeline for potential full-time employees? Do you seek to cultivate talent in young professionals?
3. What do you want the intern to learn while interning at your organization?
4. Who would you like them to work with or meet?
5. Would having interns benefit current staff members by providing managerial and supervisory experience?
6. What type of project work needs to be completed?
7. Is there an individual in the organization that will serve as the intern's supervisor and point of contact for the University?
8. Do you have the support of senior management?
9. Does your organization have the space and resources to support an intern and his/her duties?
10. What is the intended duration of the internship? Will the need to fill this position be ongoing, or complete after one term?

11. What time of year can you host an intern? What are ideal start and end dates for the internship? Is this a part-time or full-time internship? Keep in mind NWU students will only be able to intern full-time during the summer.)
12. Are specific skills or technical knowledge/ experience required to adequately complete the assigned tasks?
13. Are you looking for an intern in a particular major(s) or program of study (see our list of majors); year-level (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior); or GPA?
14. Can your organization offer opportunities for unique industry experiences during the internship? (Conferences, professional development, networking with industry professionals, etc.)
15. Are you able to develop and implement a training and orientation program for new interns?

DO I NEED TO PAY THE INTERN?

Nebraska Wesleyan University is a member of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). As such, we support [NACE's position](#) that unpaid internships are problematic for many reasons.

The U.S. Department of Labor created the Fair Labor Standards Act to help employers and career centers determine whether interns must be paid the minimum wage and overtime for the services they provide to for-profit private sector employers. The [criteria](#) outlined in the FLSA help to determine if an employment relationship does or does not exist between a worker (to be determined as an intern or employee) and their employer, thus telling if the worker must be paid. The FLSA criteria to test if an employment relationship exists are whether:

1. The internship, even though it includes actual operations of the facilities of the employer, is similar to training which would be given in an educational environment.
2. The internship experience is for the benefit of the intern.
3. The intern does not displace regular employees, but works under close supervision of existing staff.
4. The employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern, and on occasion its operations may actually be impeded.
5. The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship.
6. The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages for the time spent in the internship.

If all six criteria are met, it can be determined that an employment relationship does not exist and the Act's minimum wage and overtime provisions do not apply to the intern and that the intern does not need to be paid. It is important to note that the language of the fourth criteria stating that employers derive "no immediate advantage from the work of the intern" may be misleading regarding the role of the intern. To explain, the organization may receive a direct benefit of the work completed by the student as the intern should be engaged in projects and tasks that contribute to the professional objectives of the organization.

Imperatively, the work needs to allow for the application of academic knowledge and the opportunity to gain new skills. The work should also be supported by the remaining five criteria. Non-profit and government agencies are currently exempt from the Department of Labor's criteria of an internship. Though the same criteria should be applied to ensure a legitimate internship experience, it is not necessary to pay an intern at a nonprofit or government agency because:

"The FLSA makes a special exception under certain circumstances for individuals who volunteer to perform services for a state or local government agency and for individuals who volunteer for humanitarian purposes for private non-profit food banks. [Wage and Hour Division] WHD also recognizes an exception for individuals who volunteer their time, freely and without anticipation of compensation for religious, charitable, civic, or humanitarian purposes to non-profit organizations. Unpaid internships in the public sector and for non-profit charitable organizations, where the intern volunteers without expectation of compensation, are generally permissible. WHD is reviewing the need for additional guidance on internships in the public and non-profit sectors." (From "[Fact Sheet #71](#): Internship Programs Under The Fair Labor Standards Act.") In short, rarely may a private for-profit company host unpaid interns, while nonprofit and government agencies have more freedom in choosing to pay their interns.

Note: The Career Center does not provide recruitment services to employers/individuals requiring prospective employees to purchase products/services contingent upon their employment with, or on behalf of, that company/individual; or are based on a "pyramid" or "multi-level" type networking structure requiring or encouraging the recruitment of others who recruit others, etc. to sell products or services.

HOW MUCH DO I PAY THE INTERN?

It is strongly recommended your organization – especially for-profit companies – always pay the intern at least minimum wage. Strive to pay a fair, competitive wage that matches the responsibilities of the position.

UTILIZE INTERNNE

[InternNE](#) is a program of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development which provides financial assistance to organizations who create new internships in the state of Nebraska. Check your company’s eligibility at [their website](#).

INTERNSHIPS: CREDIT VS. NON-CREDIT

Most academic departments require at least one internship as part of their curriculum (or an equivalent experiential learning activity like a clinical rotation or capstone research project).

Internships completed for academic credit are more structured than non-credit internships and will require assignments to be completed by the student, and evaluations will be submitted by the student and their internship supervisor. Regardless of credit received, internships are expected to provide a student with hands-on learning in a safe environment where they are supervised by a professional in the student’s field of interest. The following table describes some of the key similarities and differences between for-credit and non-credit internships at Nebraska Wesleyan University.

For-Credit Internships	Both	Non-Credit Internships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Students enroll in a credited internship course that is led by their faculty internship coordinator. » Students may be required to write objectives, blogs, journals, reports, etc. They may share their experiences in class, or with a peer. Some also complete presentations as part of the course. » Students may need to be a certain year-level (sophomore, junior, senior) to enroll in the internship course; there may be prerequisites for the course. » A minimum number of hours must be completed at the internship site (hour requirements vary by department, but 45 hours per credit earned is common). » Internship courses range from 3–12 credits depending on the academic program and the minimum-hour requirements. Students pay for this credit. » Students may have restrictions on the time of year in which they can do a credited internship. » Students and their site supervisors will complete an evaluation at the end of the internship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Internships are encouraged for all students. » A mentor/supervisor at the organization will provide guidance and feedback to the student on their duties and performance. » Provides a valid learning experience and exposes the student to equipment and practices found in their industry. » Provides a safe work environment where the intern is free of harassment, is able to express thoughts and opinions, and is given the tools and materials necessary to fulfill their responsibilities. » Internship opportunities are posted by organizations onto our online job board, Handshake, and marketed to the campus community as appropriate. » Start and end dates are determined and agreed upon by the student and the employer-supervisor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Students do not enroll in an internship course and therefore complete the internship without the oversight of a faculty coordinator » No formal assignments or written evaluations are required, unless specified by the host organization. » No minimum or maximum hour requirement is set by the University. » There is no limit to the number of non-credit internships. » There are no prerequisite courses. » There is no restriction on when the internship takes place.

MARKETING YOUR INTERNSHIP

Once you have created a position description for the internship, there are a number of ways to market the opportunity to students:

1. Nebraska Wesleyan's online job and internship board, Handshake. Register for a free (core) account at: https://app.joinhandshake.com/employer_registrations/new As an employer, you can create a profile and post internships as well as full-time or part-time opportunities.
2. The Career Center will share the internship posting and relevant information with faculty, staff, internship coordinators, and students through various forms of communication.
3. You may schedule a strategy meeting with the Career Center to discuss further recruitment and marketing initiatives.

ORIENTATION CHECKLIST: ONBOARDING THE INTERN

Just as you would provide orientation for a new employee, you should familiarize the intern with the ins and outs of your organization and help them acclimate to their new work environment. Many students are unfamiliar with the activities, environment, and objectives of business and industry; a thorough orientation will help. The sooner your student-interns understand what your organization does and how it operates, the sooner they can assume their assigned responsibilities and become active and productive in your company.

Prior to the start of the internship:

- Establish and agree upon the start date, end date, and work hours/schedule. Adhere to the agreed upon hours and dates as closely as possible. During the internship, changes in scheduling should be discussed in advance.
- If the student is completing the internship for academic credit, provide assistance with granting credit as needed.
- Set up an organized workspace for the intern; set up phone, computer, email, and any other resources necessary for the intern to fulfill the responsibilities discussed.
- Establish expectations regarding the organizational dress code.
- Review employer expectations and job description; outline work expectations for the duration of the internship.
- Review and discuss the mission of the organization and how the intern fits into that role.

Within the first two weeks of the internship:

- Provide a tour of the facility and introduce the intern to other employees.
- Provide an overview of the company culture.
- Further discuss the position description and specific task/project details.
- Discuss absences, such as how and when to notify the supervisor (provide phone numbers).
- Discuss documentation of work time, including proper completion and deadlines, and time off rules.
- Explain use of equipment such as phones, computer, copier, fax machine, supplies/forms.
- Provide intern with organization chart and contact list of key personnel (supervisor, IT, HR, etc.).
- Review company policies and safety/emergency policies. Students should be made aware of your company's sexual harassment policy.
- Establish project timeframes and expectations on how to complete projects.
- Review procedures for payment and reimbursement of travel expenses (if applicable).
- Outline opportunities to network within the organization.

How can you provide this information?

- Provide company materials to read such as newsletters, annual reports, org charts, etc.
- Encourage your intern to spend breaks and lunchtimes in places where employees gather.
- Schedule regular one-to-one meetings with the intern.
- Give the intern opportunities to observe or participate in professional meetings.