UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING & MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES

Internship/Co-Op Guide for Employers & Supervisors

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THE BASICS

WHAT IS AN INTERNSHIP OR CO-OP?

An internship is an opportunity to enhance classroom learning and gain practical experience in an industry related to a student’s field of study for a fixed, limited period of time. Internships can be full- or part-time, and paid or unpaid.

A co-op is an educational program where the student alternates periods of academic study with full-time employment in positions related to their academic and/or career interests. Co-ops last over a 9-12 month period.

Internships and Co-ops can be found in corporate, private, government, and nonprofit organizations. These positions have the primary goal of providing students an opportunity to learn career-related skills and knowledge.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF HIRING A STUDENT INTERN OR CO-OP?

According to the 2011 Job Outlook survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), internships are one of the most effective recruiting methods for hiring new college graduates. Internships and Co-ops can serve as extended interviews allowing companies to more fully evaluate a student’s potential, strengths, weaknesses, and fit in the company culture.

In short, an internship or co-op program can help employers:

- Find and evaluate new employees in a cost-effective manner
- Increase employee retention by hiring students who are already familiar with the company and work environment when accepting a full-time position
- Increase productivity by having extra hands
- Provide employees supervisory or mentoring opportunities
- Bring energy, creativity, new and innovative ideas, and perspective into the company
- Give back to the community and enhance students professional development and preparedness to enter the work force.

WHAT IS A MEANINGFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCE?

Internships and co-ops should provide meaningful learning experiences with genuine opportunities for students to learn about their desired career path outside of a classroom environment. To be considered a meaningful learning experience, an internship should:
• Include specific measurable learning objectives or outcomes
• Align with the student’s major and/or learning objectives
• Include professional tasks and independent projects that develop a student’s skills and expertise in the field of study
• Provide the intern with adequate supervision and mentorship by an experienced professional
• Give the intern opportunities to learn a variety of tasks, interact with employees in several parts of the organization, and ask questions
• Provide regular feedback to the intern regarding performance

PLANNING & PREPARATION
BEFORE THE INTERNSHIP/CO-OP

DETERMINE THE NEEDS OF YOUR ORGANIZATION

Researching the needs of your organization and what you can provide to interns and co-op students beforehand can ensure a productive and valuable experience and save substantial time in making adjustments after you have already begun the internship/co-op.

Some thoughts to consider are:

• What are your current needs?
• What kind of projects/work assignments do you foresee interns undertaking?
• What is the minimum experience required to complete projects/work assignments and is it likely that a student in college will have this experience?
• Do you have workspace available to support the desired number of interns?
• Do you have employees willing to mentor the interns?
• Will you be able to offer a range of meaningful learning opportunities to the interns?
• What salary and benefits will you be able to offer?

CREATE A POSITION DESCRIPTION & WORK PLAN

Employers are expected to provide work experiences that are challenging and educational. Creating a position description will ensure that all parties involved have a clear understanding of expectations and responsibilities.
This following list provides general information of what a position description should contain, but is not all-inclusive:

- A proper job title
- A description of the organization and work environment
- A clear description of the position, general responsibilities, and learning objectives
- The necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to be successful in the position
- The minimum education and experience requirements
- Additional preferred qualifications
- Length of the internship and time requirements
- Compensation

In addition to creating a position description, it is important to create a work plan that details how work and training will progress throughout the internship. Programs that do not have a structured plan from the beginning can lead to unclear expectations for the student and supervisor and an internship/co-op experience that lacks quality for both the student and the organization.

Some suggestions are to:

- Assign projects that relate to the intern's area of study and/or learning objectives
- Provide an orientation to the company and its culture
- Provide sufficient and appropriate training regarding project tasks
- Provide opportunities for interns to get involved with company activities
- Assign each intern a supervisor or mentor and ask supervisors to schedule regular meetings for feedback
- Determine day-to-day and week-to-week projects, work assignments, and professional development opportunities prior to bringing your interns on board

**DETERMINE SALARY/COMPENSATION**

Compensation is not required or regulated by the University of Vermont. However, with the financial demands of tuition, housing, travel, and other personal expenses, many students necessitate some form of remuneration in order to take an internship opportunity, and cannot afford to work for free. For these reasons, we encourage you to compensate your interns. Most internships for engineering, mathematics, statistics, and computer science students are paid and many students will not accept an unpaid internship.
Important notes:

- When determining compensation, consider your industry, location, and desired skills and experience. Some interns/co-ops may be completing the same amount of work as an entry-level employee.
- Internship/Co-Op tasks should NOT be viewed as busy work or a form of "cheap labor"
- Offering competitive compensation will increase your number and quality of applicants.
- Compared to unpaid internship opportunities, paid internships statistically see:
  - 2.5 times the number of applications
  - A more diverse applicant pool
  - Happier and more engaged interns
  - A steadier flow of talented interns who may become your future employees
    – Internmatch.com

- If you are a for-profit organization and are considering offering an unpaid internship, know that following requirements for unpaid internships are dictated by the US Department of labor, and are outlined in the document entitled “Fact Sheet 71”.

- Interns must be paid at least minimum wage ($9.60/hr in Vermont) unless the internship meets all six criteria below:
  1. The internship, even though it includes actual operation 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; and
  6. The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages for the time spent in the internship.
    – U.S. Department of Labor Fact Sheet #71

***If you are unsure whether your internship meets the above criteria, we recommend that you consult with your attorney.
SELECT THE TOP CANDIDATE

Once details of the internship have been identified and agreed upon, you are now ready to begin recruiting for the position(s). If you are participating in the UVM’s College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences Internship and/or Engineering Co-Op Program, we will advertise the position for you, work closely with you to identify the qualities you are looking for in the ideal intern, and preselect the top 2 to 5 candidates for each internship position from those that apply.

If you are not participating in these programs, you can advertise your internships on UVM’s Catamount Job Link (http://www.uvm.edu/career/cjl).

Once you have received or selected the top candidates, you can coordinate the interview process. Interviews may be in person or via phone. If applicable, you may then schedule second interviews with those students that you are interested in. Once you have selected the interns based on their interviews and skills, you are ready to make the internship offer.

MAKING AN OFFER

Once you have identified your top candidate(s), you are ready to make an offer. It is important to make an official offer in writing. You may also make the offer via email or over the phone, but it is very important to have a written offer. This offer should specify at minimum:

- Internship position title
- Start and end dates
- Salary/Compensation
- Supervisor
- Work days, hours, time off
- Any benefits
- Project duties
- Deadline for responding to the offer
- Where to send the signed letter upon acceptance

Make sure the intern understands that he or she must officially accept the offer by signing the letter and returning it to the address provided.

THE LEARNING AGREEMENT

A learning agreement is a written document signed by the student, internship/co-op supervisor, and, in some cases, the career coordinator and/or UVM faculty advisor for the student. The agreement provides a framework and structure for the experience. It ensures that the internship is a meaningful learning
experience, details the internship/co-op project, and lists the specific roles of the parties involved. It may include learning objectives for the student, the internship project description, and responsibilities of all parties signing the document.

If you are part of the UVM CEMS Internship or Engineering Co-Op Program, the intern’s supervisor will be asked to sign a learning agreement shortly after the intern accepts the internship offer. The Internship Coordinator will send the learning agreement to the intern to complete. The student will complete part of this form then send to the site supervisor. The supervisor will complete the remaining sections, sign it, and send back to the student for their signature. If everything is in order, the intern will send the final form with all signatures to the Career Readiness Coordinator, Lauren Petrie (Lauren.Petrie@uvm.edu).

PREPARING FOR THEIR FIRST DAY

It is important to take some time to make sure everything is set for interns before they arrive.

Some suggestions are to:

- Set-up an organized work area for the intern
- Set-up parking, building access, email, voicemail, computer access and other resources necessary for interns to accomplish first day tasks
- Prepare human resource forms needed to be completed and/or signed
- Prepare for intern orientation (see below)
- Check in with intern supervisors and make sure expectations and guidelines are clear
- Review learning agreements and objectives
- Review project tasks and deadlines and answer any additional questions

THE INTERNSHIP/CO-OP EXPERIENCE

THE FIRST DAY: ORIENTATION

The intern’s first day is important. For employers that use internships as important mechanisms for recruiting full-time employees, first impressions are crucial. For many students, this is their first “real” job and they are nervous and not sure what to expect. Some simple steps can alleviate their anxiety, make them feel welcome, and make sure everyone gets off to a good start.
An orientation is a formal way to welcome students, review company policies and expectations, and complete necessary paperwork. An orientation should include the following:

- **Basic company information**
  - Give a tour of the company noting location of cafeteria, restrooms, meeting rooms, mailroom, copier, emergency exits, safety equipment, etc.
  - Explain what your company does and the structure of the organization
  - Outline organization policies, rules, and expectations including but not limited to:
    - Work hours, breaks, holidays, time and leave reporting
    - Dress code
    - Meeting protocol
    - Communicating absences and changes to work schedule
    - Maintaining their work space
    - Anti-harassment
    - Social media and cell phone use
    - Security
    - Confidentiality
    - Safety and emergency procedures
    - Visitors
    - E-mail and internet use
  - Explain office procedures, telephone system, handling mail, photocopying, answering the telephones, etc.
  - Distribute keys, ID badges, etc.
  - Provide an introduction to all of the employees that the intern will be working with and explain their duties
  - Discuss any confidentiality issues they need to know

- **Project specific information**
  - Introduce the intern to the employee who will be their supervisor/mentor
  - Explain who can answer questions if the supervisor/mentor is unavailable
  - Describe the intern’s responsibilities and specific job/project assignment(s) and deadlines
  - Show the intern where all the tools they will need for the job/project are located and explain their usage, if the intern is not familiar with them
  - Provide the intern with any training that may be required to do their job/project including safety training
  - Describe the type of customers the intern will be dealing with and how the intern should interact with clients and vendors
  - Explain the procedure for reporting the progress of the project
Discuss training and meeting schedule for the internship
Review detailed schedule for first week and beyond

SUPERVISING AN INTERN/CO-OP

The internship/co-op supervisor has a very important role. He or she can determine the success of the internship/co-op, the value to the student’s education, and, in some cases the student’s chosen career path.

Because of the importance of good supervision, it is important to select a mentor or supervisor who enjoys working with students, and is willing/able to teach. He or she should understand and value mentorship and be committed to the interns professional development.

The supervisor has several important tasks. The individual should:

• Clearly describe all expectations, project tasks, and deadlines
• Meet with the student on a regular basis to give direction and feedback
• Provide constructive feedback and any suggestions for improvements
• Look for learning opportunities to expand the student’s knowledge and experience
• Treat the intern with respect
• Offer guidance and the opportunity for self-direction and responsibility
• Give support, motivation, and encouragement
• Help the intern work through difficulties and obstacles
• Offer opportunities for informal discussion
• Schedule time to discuss career goals and options
• Notify the UVM Career Readiness Coordinator (Lauren Petrie, Lauren.Petrie@uvm.edu) as soon as any problems arise

THE FINAL DAYS

INTERN/CO-OP PRESENTATIONS

Giving students the opportunity to present the work they completed during the internship or co-op can be valuable for many reasons. This can help the student develop their presentation skills and confidence. For the organization, student presentations can be a great way to showcase the beneficial work a student has done for the company, and give employees the chance to evaluate potential full-time hires.

Since many students have never given a formal presentation in a professional work environment, it is important to give them guidance on how to structure and deliver their work. Supervisors should review student presentations several days prior to the presentation and discuss delivery and attire. It is important to remind the audience that the presenters are students and that their questions should be modified appropriately.
EVALUATIONS

A very important part of the internship for the student is learning about his or her strengths and weaknesses in a professional work environment. While some of this learning can happen informally, formal evaluations from their internship supervisor are the most effective way for students to receive this information. Performance evaluations and exit meetings to review evaluations can help a student identify areas where they need more work and things they can do to help develop those weaknesses. Meetings to review evaluations can also be a great time to discuss career planning and training with the student.

If you are part of UVM’s College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences (CEMS) Internship Program, we will send student evaluation forms to the internship supervisors to complete. The first evaluation should be completed halfway through the internship. The supervisor should complete the form and then share it with the student to discuss progress and areas that need more work. A final student evaluation form will be sent to the internship supervisors towards the end of the internship and should be completed and discussed with the student as for the mid-internship evaluation. The final evaluation form will also include an evaluation of the UVM CEMS Internship Program. Both mid-internship and final evaluation forms should be sent to the UVM CEMS Career Readiness Program Coordinator, Lauren Petrie (Lauren.Petrie@uvm.edu) when complete.

Organizations can also have students complete evaluations rating their internship experience at the company and with their internship supervisor. This information can be used to improve the internship experience for future interns.

SAYING GOODBYE & THANK YOU

Interns have spent the entire summer with you and may have provided your company with valuable work. A formal thank you and goodbye is a nice way to show appreciation.

Companies can:

• Host a going away party.
• Take interns to lunch.
• Invite interns to post internship stories on company blogs or websites.
• Give a small gift, thank you note, or certificate of completion.

NEED SUPPORT OR HAVE QUESTIONS?

Contact Lauren Petrie, CEMS Career Readiness Program Coordinator. Lauren can meet or speak with employers to discuss hosting interns/co-ops further, and help in creating positions. Lauren can also coordinate events which allow employers to share any available opportunities (internships, co-ops, or full-time positions).

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