Student Applied Learning & Internship Search Toolkit

What is an internship?

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 give students the opportunity to gain valuable applied learning experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths; and give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent.*

*National Association of Colleges and Employers

Why should I have an applied learning experience?

- **Test-drive your career interest**: This is your chance to apply classroom theory to the real world and explore a field of interest in a hands-on context to see how it fits.
- **Gain an edge in future employment**: A May 2015 US News and World Report article stated that internships service as a recruiting tool for 75% of employers. Plus, according to a 2012 Chronicle of Higher Education study, internships are the most important factor employers consider when reviewing recent college graduates.
- **Networking**: The Federal Bureau of Labor found that 70% of people acquire jobs through networking. An internship is the perfect opportunity to connect with professionals in your field.
- **Enrich your resume and portfolio**: Immersed in the workplace, you will gain professional and interpersonal skills, and may work on projects that you can add to your portfolio.
- **Gain personal growth and confidence**: The professional workplace will challenge you in new ways and push you beyond your comfort zone.

Who can do an internship?

- **Currently-enrolled full-time undergraduate and graduate students in all majors**: Some majors require an internship. You and/or your employer may have to complete assignments, evaluations, etc. for you to get credit.*
- **International students**: Students with F-1 student visas qualify for Curricular Practical Training (CPT). All international students interested in doing an internship should meet with the Global Education Office (GEO) to ensure that they are in compliance with their visa.

When can you do an internship?

- Each academic department sets individual requirements for when a student can do an internship for credit. Most students typically do an internship during their junior or senior year, but the CDC encourages first-year and sophomores to begin exploring internships.
- Most internships are part-time during the fall and spring and full-time during the summer. Some students may also combine a summer with a fall or spring internship.
Where can you do an internship?

- Internships conducted during the semester are typically conducted in the North Country region. Some are close to campus, others require transportation. Additionally, some internships are conducted outside of the region and are conducted throughout New York State, across the country, or even abroad.
- Applied Learning Grants are available to help offset costs of transportation or other costs associated with doing an internship. More information regarding applied learning grants are available here: (add link when available)

Next Steps

- **Preparation:**
  - Self-Assessment: Think about your personal and academic interests, professional or graduate school goals, work values, and skills and abilities. The CDC can help with career counseling and utilizing career assessments to help you to define a career direction, select a major, or select an internship that will further your career ambitions.
  - Resume: This sums up your experience and what you can contribute to an organization. Refer to the CDC Resume & Cover Letter Guide: and come in to the CDC’s walk in hours or set up an appointment with a Career Counselor to hone in your resume.
  - LinkedIn/Online Branding: Create a profile on LinkedIn for networking and to expand beyond your resume. Use this link to get started: [https://students.linkedin.com/](https://students.linkedin.com/)

- **Exploration:**
  - There are a number of ways to find an internship, from using SUNY Plattsburgh’s own internship and job portal *CardinalConnect* to creating your own opportunity through research and networking.
  - Networking: Learn about your field and start developing connections in the following ways:
    - Faculty and staff from SUNY Plattsburgh
    - Former and present employers
    - Friends, acquaintances, family, and mentors
    - Student and professional groups and alumni associations
    - Networking events on and off campus
  - Informational interviews:
    - Set up short (20-30 minute) meetings with contacts to learn about their careers and the field in general, and ask for career advice. Follow up with a *thank you note*! For more information on informational interviews, check out this article: [http://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2013/12/11/how-to-land-and-ace-an-informational-interview/](http://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2013/12/11/how-to-land-and-ace-an-informational-interview/)
  - SUNY Plattsburgh resources:
    - *Handshake*, SUNY Plattsburgh’s job and internship search portal.
• CareerShift, for internships and job searching
  o Academic Department: Your department may have its own internship connections, especially if it has an internship requirement. Connect with your academic advisor to see what opportunities may be available within your department.

• Application:
  o Cover Letter: Most employers require you to sum up how you found out about the job, what you can contribute to the company, and what you hope to gain from the experience in two to three paragraphs. Refer to the Resume and Cover Letter Guide: ()
  o Resume: Along with a cover letter, most employers will require a resume. Be sure to either upload your resume to CardinalConnect or see a CDC staff member in person to discuss your resume and ensure it is in good shape.
  o References: Find teachers, employers, and mentors who can articulate your unique qualities and strengths. Make sure you ask that they are willing to serve as a reference and give them a brief description of what you are applying for.

• Interview Process:
  o Phone Screening: Some employers start the interview process with an initial phone screen. Here are some tips for a successful phone interview:
    http://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/mastering-the-phone-interview
  o Interview: Meet the employers in person to showcase how you can benefit them, they can determine you are a good fit, and you can learning more about the position. To prepare, here are sample questions you may be asked:
  o Thank you notes: Email or hand written, within 24 hours of the interview.

• When you have an offer:
  o Negotiation: Agree on mutually beneficial terms.
  o Determining the terms of an internship: You will be required to develop a learning agreement outlining the education and professional goals of your internship with your internship site supervisor and your campus sponsor.
  o CPT Paperwork: Required for international students. Consult with the GEO office to make sure you remain in compliance with your visa.
  o Internship Paperwork: Complete all required paperwork for your internship by both the employer, and/or your academic department (if for academic credit)

• During your internship:
  o Professional behavior: Remember that you aren’t just an intern, you are also representing SUNY Plattsburgh, and the ability of future SUNY Plattsburgh interns to have an experience at the same location. The better you respect workplace etiquette, the more successful your experience will be and the more likely you will develop positive contacts as you grow your career.
What can the CDC Provide as you prepare for an internship?

- Help you conduct a self-assessment and determine a plan of action.
- Review your resume, cover letter, LinkedIn profile, etc.
- Discuss networking and internship search strategies
- Mock interviews
- Employer panels, job and internship fairs, and networking events

When do I begin looking for an internship?

NOW! Start looking on Handshake and come in to the CDC and make an appointment us to start thinking about your internship search strategy.
What Can You Expect from an Applied Learning Experience?

What you can expect from your Applied Learning experience!

Applied Learning and internships require a partnership between the student, the internship site, and the college. In return, the experience provides students with the opportunity to achieve the following:

- Bridge the gap between your academic present and your professional future;
- Apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a world of work context;
- Discover your strengths and learn about your areas for growth;
- Network with professionals in your field of interest;
- Experience a professional organization and its culture;
- Add value to an organization by contributing to its daily activities;
- Develop personal and professional competencies in the following areas:
  - Communication skills
  - Self-Confidence
  - Customer service skills
  - Industry and business knowledge
  - Self-sufficiency
  - Personal Organization
  - Professional Networks
  - Professional Ethics

Competencies

The following key competencies are the result of feedback from students who participated in applied learning & internship experiences. Students should focus on developing these competencies during their in applied learning and internship experiences.

Communication Skills

Learn how to talk with supervisors, colleagues, and clients and realize that people need to be communicated with in different ways.

Helpful Hints:

- Make a good first impression by dressing appropriately, making eye contact and offering a firm handshake;
- Think about your audience because different people respond to different styles of communication;
- Think of all the written communication as a formal document, including emails, letters, and reports. Don’t write anything you wouldn’t want to see posted throughout the organization;
- When initiating a conversation, always ask the person if they have a moment to talk;
● Seek opportunities to speak publically or make formal presentations whenever possible;
● Learn the names and roles of the people you are working with;
● If you are required to make a formal presentation, make sure to practice beforehand;
● Allow time to proof read documents to check for spelling, grammar, and format;
● Always ask for help if you are unsure about something.

Self Confidence:

Learn to become confident in your abilities, but understand that asking questions is not a sign of weakness.

Helpful Hints:

● Before you start, work with your internship supervisor and your faculty sponsor to establish expectations and learning outcomes of what you are hoping to achieve from this experience;
● Attempt everything to the best of your ability;
● Focus on what you do know and how much you are improving each day, rather than focusing on what you don’t know;
● Observe how your supervisor and your colleagues conduct themselves professionally;
● Learn what you can from others by watching and carefully listening—then ask questions if there is something you don’t understand;
● Remember that asking questions is not a weakness, it actually demonstrates a willingness to learn;
● Request feedback and be prepared to take on constructive criticism without being defensive;
● Be open-minded about the new things you learn and the advice you are given;
● Reflect on your mistakes and consider what could be done to improve moving forward.

Customer Service:

Try to look through a different lens and see yourself through the eyes of the customer/client.

Helpful Hints:

● Ask your workplace supervisor to brief you on the customers/clients of their organization;
● Research your customers/clients and think about your role through their eyes;
● Attend as many events as possible to interact with your customers/clients;
● Investigate as many sources as possible to understand what makes great customer service;
● Respect all customers/clients and realize that your role exists because you have them.

Industry and Business Knowledge:

Be familiar with resources, software, and management systems that are relevant in your industry.

Helpful Hints:

● In preparation, research the organization and the key people within the organization;
● Ask your supervisor questions about the organization to gain an overall perspective;
● Seek opportunities to develop business skills, e.g. marketing, project planning;
● Familiarize yourself with software and management systems that are used in the organization;
● Ask colleagues about working efficiently and any advice they have.

Self-Sufficiency:

Always think about what else you can do in a situation: how can you make it better? What can you do when you have ‘nothing’ to do?

Helpful Hints:

● Set clear learning outcomes and professional development goals that give you direction;
● Take responsibility for organizing your own work with the help of your supervisor;
● Take ownership of your projects and use your initiative to develop your role;
● Challenge yourself to think creatively by drawing inspiration from a variety of sources, including what you have learned in the classroom;
● Think ahead so that you have some ideas about what to do next and don’t always wait for instruction;
● Provide suggestions to your supervisor or think through some possible solutions if you think you have a problem;
● Ask questions and make suggestions to demonstrate that you are thinking for yourself;
● Remember that future employers want to hear about examples of when you have used your own initiative.

Personal Organization:

Learn to prioritize tasks and make a plan of action for every task to ensure that you work ahead of time in order to meet deadlines.

Helpful Hints:

● Clarify the projects you are responsible for with your supervisor and discuss what needs to happen to finish each project;
● Create an action plan for each project by breaking down big tasks into smaller tasks;
● Ask your internship supervisor if the organization uses a specific organization tool;
● Schedule a recurring meeting with your supervisor to discuss your performance;
● Alert your supervisor if you encounter a problem you are unable to solve;
● If you feel overwhelmed, discuss with your supervisor how you might prioritize your tasks;

Professional Networks:

It’s not always what you know, it’s who you know. Develop your contacts at your internship site and expand your personal network.
Helpful Hints:

- Introduce yourself to as many people as possible;
- Develop contacts and connect on LinkedIn;
- Conduct informational interviews when possible with contacts you develop and try to understand how they got to where they are in their career.

Professional Ethics:

When in the workplace, leave your student persona at the door and present/conduct yourself as a member of the staff.

Helpful Hints:

- Be professional by treating your internship as you would a permanent job;
- Remember that you are representing not only yourself, but SUNY Plattsburgh as well;
- Use professional language in all forms of communication;
- Meet with your supervisor to discuss the values, codes of conduct, and regulations at your organization;
- Observe the conduct of other members of the staff for guidance;
- Be reliable, if you say you're going to do something, be sure to do what you say;
- Take responsibility for your actions and be honest about your mistakes;
- Be punctual and prepared for what you are responsible for each day;
- Dress appropriately and remember that it is often better to be over-dressed than under-dressed until you have worked out what level of formality is appropriate.
Crafting Learning Outcomes

As a student, you will likely need to craft learning outcomes you hope to attain from the experience. This should be done before you start your experience, so you are able to work with your faculty sponsor and site supervisor to ensure the intended learning outcomes are attainable in the experience.

1. Begin by creating a list of personal/professional strengths and areas for improvement. Include both technical and professional skills and personal attributes.

2. With this list in hand, ask yourself these questions:
   - What technical skills would I like to acquire during this applied learning experience?
   - What do I do well and can contribute to the organization? (manage a work project, analyze a problem, write a technical report, work well in a diverse team….)
   - What “employability” skills would I like to improve upon? (self-confidence, communication, accepting constructive criticism, leadership or organizational abilities.)

3. Other questions to consider include:
   - What career or functional areas would I like to learn more about during this co-op work session?
   - What does the job market look like in terms of growth or opportunity in my chosen area of study?

4. CAREFULLY READ THE POSITION DESCRIPTION. Make sure your learning objectives are in line with the actual duties and responsibilities of the job. Once you get have some time on the job you may find you want to refine or redirect some of your learning objectives. Do this with your employer.

5. Review your learning objectives with your supervisor frequently. These discussions will help you understand the employer expectations, allow you to ask for specific assistance, and make sure you are participating in meaningful work.

6. Last, but not least, as you develop learning objectives, make sure you and your supervisor have some concrete ideas for how you can specifically achieve your goals. Attaching a realistic and attainable indicator of achievement will ensure that you are able to meet your learning objectives.

Sample Learning Objectives and Measures of Achievement

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Objectives (Skills and Knowledge Sought)</th>
<th>Measure of Achievement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To understand the functional areas of the company and how the engineering divisions supports the company’s products and services</td>
<td>Will create an organizational chart with roles/functions of primary areas based upon interviews with managers.</td>
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<td>To become proficient in laboratory safety rules, standard operating procedures and precautions</td>
<td>Will be able to explain and demonstrate general safety rules and procedures</td>
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<td>To seek clarification and assistance when presented with unfamiliar tasks</td>
<td>Will initiate bi-weekly meetings with my supervisor and present written questions and possible approaches to new tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>To gain greater confidence in ability to present information and concepts in a group setting</td>
<td>Will develop a presentation for my supervisors, colleagues, and other interns on a major project</td>
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