DESIGNING A VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

AT Westfield State University

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Having an intern in the office lends to more frequent opportunities to offer support, mentorship and ongoing training, however, the quality of the experience can be successfully replicated in a virtual internship. With careful planning and thoughtful consideration on how to translate the in-person internship to a virtual experience, you can successfully supervise the intern and create a meaningful experience. In designing a successful virtual internship program, there are a number of factors to consider in developing your implementation plan. We have outlined helpful tips to assist you in creating your virtual internship and are available to collaborate with you.

IDENTIFY TECHNOLOGY AND TOOLS FOR YOUR NEEDS

An important first step in developing a virtual internship program is securing support from all key players and management to ensure that adequate staffing and office resources are provided to support hiring a remote intern. Determine and secure the technology and tools required to make the remote internship successful. For example, consider offering the student access to the company intranet, a virtual workspace on a server, an online project management tool or a document-sharing tool to allow the supervisor to monitor the intern's work. Depending on the nature of your work, identifying the right online collaboration tool will be critical for sharing documents, providing real-time feedback, assigning tasks and communicating regularly with interns. Tools like Zoom, Slack, Microsoft Teams, Basecamp and Google Drive make collaborating remotely a lot easier and ensures that everyone is on the same page. Consider using both online platforms to clarify tasks and ask questions, and project management online tools to send reminders, delegate online projects and offer advice. Trello, Automatic, Basecamp, Buffer and Slack are popular tools for managing projects and communicating questions, updates and daily goals. Evaluate the various options to determine the right online collaboration tool(s) for your needs.

IDENTIFYING AN INTERNSHIP SUPERVISOR

The Internship Supervisor should be an experienced professional with expertise in the content area of the internship who can train, monitor and evaluate the student's work. Ideally, the supervisor should be someone who has a positive attitude about the company and the profession; is comfortable offering constructive criticism as well as praise; is familiar with online collaboration/project management tools; and is able to motivate the student to grow as a professional.

The Internship Supervisor will:

- Set up an initial meeting to discuss the job description, internship goals, hours, and start/end dates and complete all necessary paperwork for credit-bearing internships.

- Orient the intern to your workplace, policies, procedures, and guidelines.

- Introduce the intern to coworkers and explain projects he or she may be working on.

- Schedule regular supervision meetings with the intern to discuss expectations and projects, and maintain an open channel of communication.

- Provide training, mentoring and supervision for the intern.

For credit-bearing internships:

- Host a site visit/phone call from the Faculty Internship Supervisor to discuss the students' projects and performance.

- Connect with the Faculty Internship Supervisor to discuss any issues such as absenteeism, lack of motivation, etc.

- Complete a mid-term and final evaluation of the intern's progress. These forms will be provided from the Faculty Internship Supervisor and assist in determining the student's final grade. The Site Supervisor may want to also meet with the intern to review the evaluation as it is an excellent tool for providing feedback to students so they may learn about their strengths, weaknesses, and strategies for improvement.

REMOTE ONBOARDING & TRAINING

Providing an internship orientation helps to establish clear expectations, communicate organizational priorities and provide your intern with the information needed to be successful in this new role. The orientation will set the tone for the experience and may be a good time to share information about developmental opportunities available to interns to encourage the retention of talent. Here are some sample topics that you may want to address:

- Organizational background & history

- Pre-assessments to assess skills

- Organizational culture and workplace expectations (such as tracking hours, breaks, etc.)

- Meeting other staff members

- Reviewing defined learning goals

- Aspects that set this organization apart from others with similar missions

- Population targeted by the work of this organization

- Common acronyms in day-to-day work

- Training on software and tools used

- Dress code

- Holidays and weather closures

- Sick leave policy

- Payroll procedures

- Confidentiality/security policies

- Expectations for interns

- Pertinent dates and events

- Supplemental online trainings available

STRUCTURED AND CLEAR COMMUNICATION PLAN

A critical component to a successful virtual internship program is a communication plan with ongoing support and feedback. Set regular meeting times – at least once a week – to connect with your intern(s) on project progress, progress in meeting learning goals, performance feedback, opportunities for additional training and challenges/questions as well as to build rapport. Supervision meetings should be facilitated through a video conference or telephone. Interns should be well informed on the company's mode of communications and which channels to use and when. Consider using video conferencing platforms for meetings, and chat, email and project management tools for regular communication. Provide the intern with clear expectations on how quickly he or she is expected to respond to messages as well as communicating what is the best forum for questions and challenges. Remaining actively involved also allows a supervisor to provide timely feedback, communicate strengths and areas for improvement, and to check in on how working remotely is going. This will allow for identifying what is working well and what is challenging for the intern in a virtual environment to continually improve the virtual internship program.

DEFINE NEEDS & ESTABLISH GOALS

Next, identify the intern's learning objectives, daily responsibilities, and short- and long-term projects. Make sure that the intern's projects involve industry-related and essential skill development. A well-established internship program will result in a strong campus presence and a stronger pool of applicants. Prior to the internship, the supervisor should work with the intern to define and establish a plan to meet learning goals for the internship. Learning goals should include industry-related knowledge, skills and abilities for a successful start in the field. Regular meetings throughout the internship should assess if the intern is on track to meet these goals.

CREATING YOUR INTERNSHIP POSTING

THE POSITION DESCRIPTION

POSITION TITLE

YOUR COMPANY NAME

COMPANY LOCATION & WEBSITE

NUMBER OF OPENINGS

DESIRED START & END DATE

COMPENSATION *(can be paid or unpaid, pay ranges from $12–$25/hr.)*

Internships can be paid or unpaid, however, the quality and number of applicants significantly increases when compensation is offered. Financial need prevents some of our highly qualified students from pursuing unpaid opportunities, particularly during the summer months. If a for-profit organization chooses to host unpaid interns, the organization must ensure that interns are considered "trainees" under the Fair

Labor Standards Act. Nonprofit organizations typically offer unpaid internships and students, for the most part, are aware that these experiences will not offer compensation. Flexibility in scheduling will allow students to keep their part-time job so they can earn money while pursuing an unpaid internship. We recommend for intern salaries that you pay 75% of the full-time rate for business and 75–100% of the full-time rate for technical positions.

HOURS/WORK SCHEDULE

Students completing internships for credit are required to complete 120 hours for every three credits they want to receive – this is roughly 8 hours/week during the school year and 20 hours/week during the summer. Most students will complete a three or six credit internship (8-16 hours/week) during the academic year; however, depending on their major, students can receive up to 15 credits for internships (40 hours/week). If a student is interested in receiving academic credit for the internship, the student will be responsible for providing the employer with the necessary paperwork. The virtual work schedule should be determined by the employer and the student so there is structure to the experience and an understanding of when the student should be available for communication. Students are not allowed to complete their hours during class times, but otherwise the start/end date and work schedule can be set by the two parties.

JOB TITLE & DUTIES

The job description should clearly explain the intern's duties and assignments. Identify daily responsibilities succinctly as well as major projects that the intern will complete. Intern projects should focus on activities related to their academic major and link classroom learning to workplace experience while making contributions to the organization. Learning goals and an action to achieve those goals and identifying how to measure progress are even more critical in a remote internship. Whenever possible, incorporate real world activities into the experience. Simulations, case studies, branching scenarios, and client meetings give interns the opportunity to gain practical experience. It allows the supervisor to assess skills, address performance issues and facilitate ongoing training. Choosing the appropriate projects is even more important for remote internships. Consider choosing projects that are important to a large group to ensure that many people in the organization are invested in the intern's success. This will allow for a larger number of available mentors, while providing the intern the opportunity to contribute to impactful work.
If a confidentiality agreement is required, it must be stated in the job description upon posting.

QUALIFICATIONS & MAJORS DESIRED

Be sure to include the physical and mental requirements of the internship as well as any specific technical or essential skills that the intern must have to perform the essential duties of the position. Also, state if you are seeking students from a particular major, minimum GPA and/or class standing (junior, senior, etc.).

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Include deadline date, required application documents and information on how students should apply.

CONTACT PERSON & CONTACT INFORMATION

Include name, title, address, email, and phone number.

NACE STANDARDS

We adhere to the NACE Standards for Internships. Experiences that DO NOT qualify as internships:

- Commission-based positions

- Positions that require more than 20% clerical duties

- Positions that require door-to-door canvassing, cold-calling, or petition gathering

- "Independent contractor" relationships that require the intern to set up his/her own business for the purpose of selling products, services and/or recruiting other individuals to set up their own business

- Positions supervised by a family member

- Telemarketing positions

- Positions in which the employer requires the student to pay a fee or fees in order to work at the organization

- Unpaid interns should not be considered "consultants" or be expected to provide a function that your professional staff does not have the skills to perform (e.g. create a company website, write a grant, develop a marketing campaign)

HOW TO POST YOUR OPPORTUNITY

Post Directly Online

Handshake allows you to post jobs and internships, request information session dates, and manage your on-campus recruiting activities at Westfield State. There is no fee to post a job or internship. Login or create a Handshake account at **westfield.joinhandshake.com**
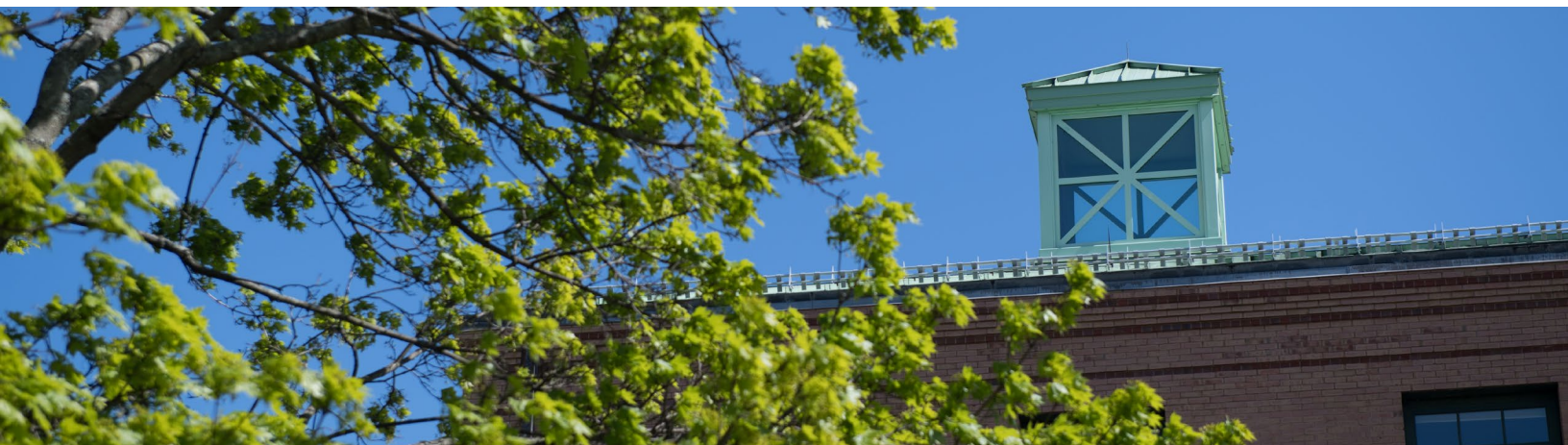
Call or email us at **careers@westfield.ma.edu** | Phone: (413) 572-5206 | Fax: (413) 572-5475

RECOMMENDED TIMELINE FOR POSTING YOUR OPPORTUNITY

SEEKING INTERN FOR	POST OPPORTUNITY
Fall Semester	January–April
Spring Semester	September–November
Summer	November–April

AFTER THE INTERNSHIP

Reflect on the experience to determine ways to improve the program for both the organization and the student. If you are interested in hiring additional students, be sure to update your posting in Handshake and notify the Career Center so we can assist you in promoting your opportunity to our students.