

Mississippi State University
Cooperative Education and Internship Program
Employer's Guide to Starting an Internship Program

What Is An Internship?

An internship is any carefully monitored work experience in which a student has intentional learning goals and reflects actively on what she or he is learning throughout the experience. An internship may be paid or unpaid and should be directly related to the student's field of study. In April 2010 the US Department of Labor issued some new guidelines for unpaid internships sponsored by for-profit employers. The DOL criteria are listed below:

1. The internship, even though it includes the operation of the facilities of the employer, is similar to training which would be given in an education environment;
2. The internship experience is for the benefit of the intern;
3. The intern does not displace regular employees, but works under the 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 the operations may be impeded;
5. The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship; and
6. The employer and intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages for the time spent in the internship.

How Do Internships Benefit Employers?

Interns can serve as a year-round source of highly motivated pre-professionals. They are flexible, cost-effective work force not requiring a long-term employer commitment. Interns bring new perspectives to old problems and procedures. Visibility of your organization is increased on the campus of the student you hire. With interns current professional staff have time to pursue more creative projects. Internships are a proven, cost-effective way to recruit and evaluate potential employees as well as a means to attract qualified candidates for temporary or seasonal positions.

Employer Guidelines:

At MSU students may enroll in an internship course that offers full-time enrollment status, academic or non-academic credit, and transcript notation for the internship experience. For Fall and Spring academic terms, the student must be enrolled in an internship course to avoid losing their student status. The MSU Career Center has set forth the following guidelines for internship semester and duration:

1. Time Frame: Fall, Spring, Summer, Spring & Summer or Summer & Fall
2. Number of hours per week – Full time employee – 32 to 40 hours/week
3. Students must work at least 2/3 of the semester to receive credit
 - a. Fall or Spring semesters are usually 19 weeks. Students must work at least 14 weeks
 - b. Summer term is 12 weeks. Students must work at least 8 weeks
4. Paid or non-paid

5. Multiple internships – Students can participate in an unlimited number of internships throughout the course of the college experience as long as it doesn't interfere with the successful completion of the academic program.
6. Employers are asked to establish a reasonable balance between the intern's learning goals and the specific work an organization needs done.
7. Each internship student must be evaluated by the employer an electronic evaluation form provided by the MSU Career Center. The completed evaluation form should be discussed with the student and submitted to the Career Center within the specified time period.

Designing the Experience:

A comprehensive internship program should have structured learning objectives, daily responsibilities, short and long-term projects, supervisor and/or mentor assignments, outlined policies and expectations, and evaluation procedures. Employers starting a new internship program are encouraged to have these things in place prior to making an internship offer.

Documentation Required by MSU Career Center:

Employer registration in Connections, MSU Career Center's online employment system
Internship offer letter on employer letterhead detailing the terms of the internship offer (i.e. start and finish date, location, supervisor, wages, and housing)
Student registration in internship class
Employer evaluation of Student
Student Evaluation of the Employer

Recruiting at MSU:

Complete registration at MSU Career Center. A personal visit to the university has been found very helpful by many employers in developing a new program.

Post job request(s) at Career Center Connections or email the Co-op Office with additional information or questions. Most employers also provide recruiting brochures, videos, and applications for interested students.

Generally one of four (4) methods is used to employ Internship candidates:

Career Days
Co-op Interview Days (IVD)
On-campus interviews (OCR)
Job Postings using CONNECTIONS
Company tours/ site visits

Work with your campus liaison <http://www.coop.msstate.edu/staff/> to develop an effective on-campus recruiting strategy.

Report all internship offers and hires to the Career Center to ensure that proper student procedures are followed.

Things to Consider Before Recruiting Interns:

What will you pay the intern?

Where will the intern work? Consider the work location, living arrangements, hours, etc.

What sort of academic background and experience must the Intern have? Decide on minimum requirements beforehand — it'll help you narrow down the choices and find the best candidates.

Who will have the primary responsibility for the intern? Will that person be a mentor or a supervisor?

Will this person be a part of the recruiting/interviewing process?

What will the intern's assignments entail? Will they have educational value?

How will performance be measured?