

What is an Internship?

An internship is a supervised on-the-job learning experience related to a student's career interest. Interns have a designated set of responsibilities or a position description and are actively supported and evaluated by a supervisor or mentor. A solid internship provides the opportunity to learn about the field while allowing the intern to make a contribution to the organization's work.

Important elements that distinguish an internship from a short-term job or community service opportunity:

- The intern, in agreement with the employer, brings to the experience an intentional learning agenda.
- The work is career-related for the student and/or ties in with academic coursework.
- The intern receives evaluation of their work from the supervisor. An intern should be mentored or supervised by someone within the company or organization that can offer career-related expertise.

Benefits of an Internship:

- Students develop career credential as they gain a knowledge of the qualifications and duties of a position and can explore their interest in a field. They gain crucial professional skills in decision making, critical thinking, as well as gaining increased confidence and self-esteem.
- Interns have the opportunity to apply knowledge learned in the classroom to the workplace.
- Employers can receive short term project help.
- Interns can energize a workplace with their enthusiasm and desire to learn.
- Employers can gain satisfaction by helping train and mentor new professionals., while addressing organization succession goals.

Internship Position Description

One of the initial steps in establishing an internship is developing a clear description of the student's duties and responsibilities and a well-defined set of expectations in relation to these assignments. Internship positions include pre-professional activities similar to those of a new entrant in the field and allow the intern to put classroom knowledge into practice through hands-on experience. This is an opportunity to educate the intern about your organization's culture, structure, practices, and goals.

At the foot of the position description, there should be a paragraph addressing the required learning agenda portion of the internship. It should read: "By the end of the internship the student would have had the opportunity to lead/participate in the following activities..."

Other aspects to be considered for a position description, and for screening purposes for both the employer and the student follow...

Qualifications

A well-defined outline of qualifications helps students evaluate their suitability for the position and is essential in order to establish a pool of appropriate candidates for an employer. Qualifications may include previous related experience, computer skills, technical skills, presentation skills, and other criteria pertinent to the position. Be sure to include any screening requirements such as background checks or TB tests, and basic professional skills that may be required in your work such as punctuality, writing ability, phone skills, and ability to work without supervision after initial training.

Hours Per Week

Internships involve enough work hours to allow students to gain valuable career-related experience and employers to obtain a measurable benefit from the student's work contributions. The average work schedule for internships during the academic year ranges from 8 to 20 hours per week; summer internships often range from 10 to 40 hours per week. The hours per week can vary. For example, an intern may work 10 hours per week while classes are in session and work 30 hours per week during winter and spring breaks. It is important for students and employers to discuss the work schedule together and develop a plan that will meet both their needs.

Duration

When arranging an internship, it is important to set a specific duration of time. This limits the initial time commitment made by the employer and student and encourages discussion between them at the conclusion of the internship. If the employer and student wish to extend the internship, they can renegotiate this when the first work period is completed. Some common time frames for internships are summer, semester, and academic year.

The Humboldt Fall Semester begins the 3rd week of August and ends in the middle of December. The Spring Semester runs from the 3rd week of January to the middle of May.

Timing and Promoting Internships

Cal Poly Humboldt Handshake is an online job and internship posting service available at <https://acac.humboldt.edu/humboldt-handshake>. Good timing for posting positions for Fall semester would be mid-summer to early August. For positions to begin in Spring semester, early November postings are most successful due to students preparing for finals and leaving the area for the holidays. For summer internships, late February and early March are ideal. While some nonprofits may offer unpaid internships (under U.S. Department of Labor guidelines - see below), only paid internships can be posted to Handshake.

Supervision

Close communication between the supervisor and the intern is essential for a successful internship. It is best to have one overall supervisor who arranges training opportunities, schedules regular meetings to discuss questions and concerns, monitors the intern's progress, and provides a verbal and written job performance evaluation at the end of the internship. The evaluation process facilitates an open exchange between the supervisor and intern and can be essential for personal development and for internship program improvements.

Evaluation

A job performance evaluation is a critical part of the internship or career-related experience. An evaluation helps the intern to acknowledge work strengths and areas for improvement. The supervisor can recommend specific coursework or technical experience for the student to pursue. This is a great opportunity for the intern to obtain letters of recommendation and establish a list of references for future jobs. Additionally, the evaluation process can be a two-way street by providing an opportunity to review and evolve future internship positions and programs.

Majors

If you know that the work involved in your internship requires classes, skills or knowledge gained in a particular academic major, please indicate. Otherwise, leave this requirement open to "any major" and seek students who have the ability and skills needed to do the job. Conversely, if the position has inherent learning objectives, these can be stated to appeal to students from specific academic fields.

Compensation vs. Unpaid Internships

In most cases, particularly with private sector/for-profit businesses, interns should ideally be compensated with an hourly minimum wage. Please refer to U.S. Department of Labor and State laws with regard to wages, stipends or other compensation. The U.S. Department of Labor provides an important reference, **Fact Sheet #71: Internship Programs Under The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)** at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/71-flsa-internships>. As interns and students may not be considered “employees” under the FLSA, this fact sheet provides a “primary beneficiary test” to determine whether an intern or student should be, in fact, an employee under the FLSA.

Unpaid Internships for Cal Poly Humboldt Academic Credit

The Humboldt Career Development Center can list only paid internships on Handshake. In some cases, students may be able to earn course credit for the internship experience, strengthening the case under U.S. Department of Labor guidance for unpaid internships by nonprofits. In this case the positions description should clearly state, **“This internship is unpaid and may be available to Cal Poly Humboldt students for course credit depending on academic department offerings; check with your faculty advisor.”**

If arrangements are made with faculty, the student may be able to receive academic credit for a major-related internship. Humboldt academic departments differ on their willingness to offer credit for internships. Students need to inquire about this possibility at their department before accepting the internship if they desire to receive credit.

The organization in these cases will be required to complete risk management paperwork with Cal Poly Humboldt that establishes the agency as an approved learning site for student interns seeking course credit, with the appropriate general liability coverage.

Training

Training educates interns about your organization’s structure, practices, and goals. Learning opportunities may include:

1. A company tour and formal or informal workplace orientation
2. Review of employee handbook or position duties and goals of position
3. Review of agency mission, any vision or core values statements, and organizational cultural expectations around diversity and inclusivity
4. Attend agency meetings with staff members from different departments
5. Job shadowing (following a staff member for a period of time to observe job duties)
6. Attend regular staff meetings and board meetings
7. Attend and participate in in-house or off-site workshops and seminars
8. Attend community meetings on policy and advocacy issue affecting the agency
9. On-the-job training by supervisor and by other staff members in diverse positions
10. Work assignments that require critical thinking and decision-making skills

Examples of Internships Posted by Local Organizations

Research Associate Intern

Position Description

Student needed for an intern position at the California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP). The California Center for Rural Policy is a research center committed to informing policy, building community, and promoting the health and well-being of rural people and environments. CCRP is located on the Cal Poly Humboldt campus.

The intern will assist the Health Policy Analyst by researching affordable housing policy. Research for this project will include gathering data about various housing needs for certain populations. Other data gathered will be the cost of housing in both counties, and the availability of housing units.

The intern will be making phone calls to various city and county agencies on the North Coast to determine what affordable housing plans are being implemented in the short and long term. This position requires a detail-oriented individual with strong interpersonal and writing skills. The intern will report directly to the Health Policy Analyst.

Qualifications

- Ability to analyze data gathered and report results in a succinct manner.
- Ability to conduct research using the internet, databases, and phone interviews.
- Have a strong desire to help rural and underserved populations.
- Excellent writing and communication skills.
- Must be self-directed and motivated.
- Must be well organized.

By the end of the internship the student will have had the opportunity to enrich data management skills, while interacting with government agency staff and developing an understanding of rural housing and social equity realities and needs addressed by local agencies .

Zoo Administration Intern

Position Description

This internship is an excellent opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge about the operation of a non-profit organization related to education, recreation and conservation of wild animals. This internship will touch on five main skills needed to run this, and other, organizations: Research, Event Planning, Outreach, Fundraising, and Administration. Tasks vary depending on the time of year and our Events calendar but can include help with our quarterly newsletter, publicity for events and campaigns, data entry, research projects, event organization and execution, bulk mailing and other tasks as assigned.

Qualifications

Looking for a motivated self-starter who is reliable and has good computer skills. Must be able to interact with a wide range of people in a professional manner. An interest in natural resources, wildlife, conservation or non-profit administration a must.

This internship is unpaid and may be available to Cal Poly Humboldt students for course credit depending on academic department offerings; check with your faculty advisor.