



STUDENT INTERNSHIPS, MENTORING AND ALUMNI PARTICIPATION

An internship is essentially short-term on-the-job training in a field that a student or young worker wants to learn more about. There are also research internships, more common in scientific fields, in which a higher-level student examines a particular topic on behalf of a business before producing a written study or presentation.

Internship Advantages

For the intern

For-profit corporations and non-profit organizations across America provide a wide range of internship opportunities during the summer and other vacations for students. From an intern's standpoint, this is an opportunity to gain a first-hand perspective on real-world problem-solving – applying class room theory to actual situations requiring practical solutions. It can also be an opportunity to demonstrate to a potential employer one's effectiveness on the job. In some ways, it is like a long interview – for the intern to assess interest in the organization.

For the employer

The employer can benefit significantly from the intern's fresh ideas unencumbered by any traditional organizational impediments. Having very intelligent, high energy, willing interns who are available at modest or no cost to undertake a project can prove to be very attractive to employers. Of course, these internships also provide the employer with the benefit of a "long interview" with prospective employees. It is not unusual for employers to extend offers for full-time employment to interns on completion of their assignments.

Issues and opportunities

An effective internship program requires having leadership and supervision in place to ensure that the intern is supervised responsibly, has a well-defined role and can gain meaningful guidance and feedback on an ongoing basis. If appropriate leadership is in place, it is worth considering a program that employs multiple interns thereby creating a social structure within the program. If appropriate leadership is not available, then an internship should not be offered.

Alumni can be very helpful in identifying internship opportunities. In many cases, alumni themselves can utilize the capabilities of an intern under their own supervision or within their organization. This is ideal because it provides a meaningful and productive experience for the alumnus as well as serving the interest of the intern and of the University.

Mentoring

Alumni involvement as mentors for students can be quite meaningful and beneficial. In the case of interns, offering opportunities to "shadow" an alumnus or alumna during the course of a typical work day affords the intern a first-hand experience in what it is like to address key decision-making situations on a real-time basis.

Outside of an organizational setting, alumni can fill a gap in underserved segments of the population where young students lack effective role models. Students who come from divorced families, or who live in foster homes, or come from family circumstances where no family member has ever gone to college can benefit greatly from alumni who are willing to invest themselves as role models and mentors. Mentoring activities can prove to be enlightening both for mentees and mentors. Alumni sharing life experiences in preparing to go to college, contemplating a career direction and establishing a family are invaluable to students and rewarding for mentors. It is motivating and affirming to mentees to discover that many successful mentors came from modest circumstances and overcame many economic and emotional challenges.

In sum

Alumni find extending a helping hand to young people a rewarding experience especially where the young people are in need of opportunities to advance themselves. Providing internships, or simply assisting such youth in the discovery of how successful people achieve their success can be quite rewarding for all.