



California State University  
**SAN MARCOS**  
ACADEMIC INTERNSHIPS

## INTERNSHIP STARTER HANDBOOK

### For Community Partners

Thank you for your interest in partnering with California State University San Marcos to provide internship opportunities to CSUSM students. This handbook is designed to help community organizations and businesses create quality internship programs that meet CSUSM's expectations for approved internships. If you have questions that are not addressed, please contact the **Academic Internship Program in the Career Center at 760-750-7005** or [internships@csusm.edu](mailto:internships@csusm.edu).

#### What is an academic internship?

An academic internship, paid or unpaid, is an educational strategy that links classroom learning and real-life applications. Quality academic internships are learning experiences facilitated by collaborative community partners that help students achieve personal and professional growth and competitive advantage in the global workforce. It is a professional learning experience (paid or unpaid) that offers meaningful, practical work related to a student's field of study or career interest. An internship gives a student the opportunity for career exploration and development, and to learn new skills. It offers the employer the opportunity to bring new ideas and energy into the workplace, develop talent and potentially build a pipeline for future full-time employees. A quality internship:

- Consists of a part-time or full-time work schedule that includes no more than 20% clerical or administrative duties.
- Provides a clear job/project description for the work experience.
- Orients the student to the organization, its culture and proposed work assignment(s).
- Helps the student develop and achieve learning goals.
- Offers regular feedback to the student intern.

Most students enroll in a 3-unit internship in which they are required to invest 90-120 hours during the semester at the internship site.

Successful internship experiences combine training and purposeful project assignments. Interns need focused, purposeful roles to keep them motivated, learning, and helping to meet organizational objectives. Virtual Internships are becoming more popular with employers and

students; with proper supervisory oversight and guidance, virtual internships can be done well and provide a great opportunity. Whether the internship is onsite or virtual, a successful internship program utilizes best practices that are in place *prior* to the arrival of the student intern and sustained until the end of the internship.

CSUSM students may only intern at sites with which we have a University Community Partnership Agreement (UCPA) to ensure they are covered by the University's workman's compensation, or at sites where the intern will be a W-2 employee paying interns at least minimum wage, in which case employment law pushes the responsibility for the employee (safety, liability) on to the paid employer.

### **Getting Started: Designing an internship program that meets your needs**

Internship activities vary by organization. Designing an internship program to meet your organizational needs depends upon several factors such as your organization's age, size, industry, service/product, and organizational goals.

**Step 1 is to determine your organization's goals** in relation to the internship program. What does your organization hope to achieve from the internship program? Are you a public agency searching for additional help on a project? Is your small company growing quickly and having difficulty finding motivated new employees? Are you a nonprofit that does not have a lot of money to pay, but can provide an interesting and rewarding experience? Is your organization searching out new employees with management potential?

All the relevant players (managers, supervisors, staffing professionals, etc.) in your internship program should reach consensus on your program goals that are clearly understood by all involved. For a program to be successful, it will require the commitment of the organization's leaders and management.

**Step 2 is to develop a written plan.** Carefully plan and write out your goals for the internship program. Managers, mentors, interns, and university career centers are all going to be reading about the internship program.

- ✓ **What will the intern be doing?** Draft a job description that clearly explains the job's duties and give the intern a taste of everything your company does. Do you want someone for a specific project? Do you want general support around the workplace? It is important to establish clear work objectives *before* the student begins the internship so that you can be sure to meet your goals and not find yourself floundering partway through.

Be as specific as possible. Interns, like others in the process of learning, need structure so they don't become lost, confused, or bored. The supervisor/mentor should develop a "learning agreement plan" that serves as an agreement of expectations between you and the student intern. The learning agreement plan should be well-thought-out and have a clear idea of what tasks the intern will work on when not working on specific

projects. The assumption should be that the student's duties will not change drastically during the internship, and if they do, it will be to the student's benefit (i.e., more responsibility for better learning experience). Having a set of well-defined responsibilities focuses the learning and gives the student a better chance of achieving critical learning objectives.

- ✓ **What academic background and experience do you want in an intern?** Are there particular skills the successful applicant should have? Decide on standards for quality beforehand — it will help you narrow down the choices and find the best candidates. Whether your intern is onsite or virtual, you cannot know how experienced they are or which skills they have until you assess them. Conduct online [pre-assessments](#), surveys, and interviews to find out how much they know and how well they know it. This also allows you to place them in the right position and department. Surveys help you determine their expectations and preferences, as well. For instance, how many hours they expect to work per week and how they wish to communicate.
- ✓ **How will you communicate expectations and information such as policies, procedures, etiquette, etc.?** It is important to orient students to your organization at the start of the internship. This can be a formal or informal process, depending on the number of interns and the needs of the organization. Some internship providers create a handbook that helps orient interns to the expectations of the organization and addresses topics as:
  - Policy/procedure manual
  - How did the organization start?
  - Mission, services, products, etc.
  - Organization's current objectives or focus
  - Intern job description
  - Work schedule including start times, end times, break times etc.
  - Email, mail, Internet, and telephone system and mail, email, and internet telephone etiquette
  - Cell phone and texting policy
  - Facebook, Twitter, and other social media policy
  - Confidentiality
  - Emergency procedures and emergency contact information for the student (see page 8 for safety checklist)
  - Security issues
  - Introductions to key personnel
  - Tours

Regardless of the structure, there are essential elements that should be included in any orientation program for interns:

- **Information about the organization:** Offer interns your company or organization's literature to review and any other documents that are important for them to understand the big picture. If available, include an organizational chart that explains various roles and responsibilities of employees.
  - **Structure:** Interns might not be familiar with formal workplace procedures (e.g., attendance policies, break times, days off). Generate a written document that clarifies relevant policies and procedures and submit this to interns on their first day with your organization.
  - **Introductions:** Take time in the beginning of the internship to introduce the intern to key people in the organization. Allow more time for conversation with those employees who are likely to interact with the intern on a regular basis. By making a special effort to encourage those contacts early on, interns will feel more comfortable asking for advice or support later.
- ✓ **Will you pay the intern?** If so, how much? Wages vary widely from field to field, so be sure yours are competitive or offer competitive incentives. Reasonable compensation (not required but certainly allowed and encouraged) or a stipend to help with the cost of tuition are encouraged. If you require your interns to use their own vehicle to do work-related tasks, consider paying for their gas. Many CSUSM students pay for their own education and, therefore, welcome an opportunity to "earn and learn." Interns bring value to an organization with their energy and innovative ideas and perspective. Paying interns a wage or stipend creates ownership in the program by both the organization and the intern. Unpaid interns are often looked upon as volunteers—a perception that can impact the learning experience from both the company and student point of view. Paid internship postings may also produce a better pool of intern candidates. Refer to the [Fair Labor Standards Act](#) as to the definitions of an intern and the rules regarding compensation as spelled out by the U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division.
  - ✓ **What will the intern's work schedule be?** Quality internships have clear expectations from the start as to hours of work that meet the needs of the student and the organization. Interns are college students and must balance school and work when participating in an internship. Most internships require between 8-12 hours per week as students are also keeping up with a full-load course schedule. Consider available supervision, workload fluctuations, and student availability.
  - ✓ **Where will you put the intern?** Do you have adequate workspace for them? Will you help him or her to make parking arrangements, living arrangements, etc.? A good space to work is critical. Space is a critical resource and although some organizations have space limitations, interns need a good place to work (as do all professionals).

Consideration needs to be given to providing an adequate place to work within an internship provider's facilities.

- ✓ **What resources will your intern need?** Interns should have adequate resources such as an assigned workspace, computer, office supplies, and telephone, to perform tasks and to learn. Virtual interns need a place to share documents, assign tasks, and communicate regularly. An [online collaboration](#) platform ensures that everyone is on the same page. Ideally, there should be Video Conferencing and [Project Management online tools](#) in place to aid this process. Interns can also use these online platforms to clarify tasks and ask questions.
- ✓ **What special training opportunities will you offer?** Quality internship programs offer interns the opportunity to gain and improve their skills and learn new ones. On-the-job training with close supervision from an experienced mentor is the best "training" but certainly can be supplemented with more formalized training, including structured self-study courses, web-based education, and workshops. For virtual internships, read [7 Tips For Developing An Effective Mentorship Online Training Program](#) to discover some tips for developing an effective mentorship online training strategy for your organization.
- ✓ **Will you offer social activities and after-hour events?** Good internships strike a balance between value-added activities and an enjoyable experience for the student. Internships should be primarily hard work and learning, but there should also be fun and enjoyment for the intern. Social activities that combine work and fun are good opportunities for intern growth. For example, organization-sponsored lunches, dinners, and even volunteering events offer students the opportunity to network with others and develop people skills. Keep in mind that your interns are walking advertisements for your organization.

**Step 3 is to decide who will supervise the interns.** Because an internship is a learning experience, **proper supervision of the intern is essential.** This is especially true for students who do not have extensive work experience. Students must be supervised by a professional in the field, not by peers; therefore, the student cannot be considered the resident expert. This person does not have to be a teacher per se but should be selected because they like to teach or train and has the resources to do it. If the person you select has never supervised an intern before, give them some basic training in mentoring. If your internship is a virtual one, the supervisor should oversee the intern's online assignments and communicate directly with the intern. The supervisor is also responsible for answering questions, resolving issues, and offering one-on-one support.

The supervisor/mentor should serve as a **positive role model** while putting a heavy emphasis on teaching and supporting the intern throughout the entire experience by helping the intern to:

- Learn about the organization
- Learn about career paths
- See possibilities of someday transitioning into the workplace into a full-time position
- Find answers to questions about projects and processes

The internship supervisor/mentor should teach lessons beyond technical knowledge that help the student learn to practice persistence, solve problems, exhibit a positive attitude, become more productive, hone their people and networking skills, plan, and prioritize

Finally, the internship supervisor/mentor should **give regular, timely feedback** to assure that interns are keeping pace and accomplishing goals. This does not mean watching their every move but do make sure you know what is happening with their daily tasks. Watch for signs that the intern is confused or bored. As often as silence means that an intern is busy, it also could mean that he or she is confused and shy about telling you so. It is easy to be shy in a workplace full of older strangers who all know each other. See whether the intern is trying to do anything that requires someone else's input. Paying attention early helps you head off problems and bad habits early on.

Likewise, it is important not to leave virtual interns to their own devices. It is not productive to simply set the ground rules, give them a list of tasks, and then send them on their way. Virtual interns need ongoing online support and feedback so that they can continually improve. Like onsite interns, they have chosen to participate because they want real world experience and insider knowledge.

It is important to give them lots of feedback! Especially if your interns have never done this kind of work before, they will want to know if their work is measuring up to your expectations. No matter what the level of experience, students need the internship supervisor/mentor, who is a more experienced worker, to let them know if their work is officially "okay". Periodically, examine what your intern has produced and make suggestions. **Regularly scheduled evaluations** help avoid common problems with internship, including miscommunication, misunderstanding of job roles, and lack of specific goals and objectives. An effective method of intern supervision is to have a set time (weekly is recommended) to meet with the intern to review progress on projects, touch base, and provide feedback. For virtual interns, this may be in the form of weekly feedback, manager evaluations, or online self-assessments that identify areas for improvement. If you are working with a group of virtual interns, hosting a webinar every week or two will allow them to interact with each other and share online training experiences.

### Ending the Internship

An internship should have a clearly stated end date that is identified before the internship begins. Some internship providers offer permanent positions to interns, but if that is not the case, **the exit interview** is a good chance to discuss such topics as future job references (letters

of reference or references on applications), staying in touch, and other possible mentoring opportunities either at the organization, company or in the industry.

Completing a formal evaluation process can help both the site supervisor and the intern bring closure to the experience. You may want to have some form of acknowledgment such as a lunch with co-workers in the final week of the internship. Because co-workers often have extensive contact with interns, this type of event can be a positive way to recognize the contribution of other employees as well as the intern. The student will also need the supervisor to verify the hours worked by signing the intern's time sheet.

The exit interview can also allow the internship provider to gather information that might help design a better internship experience in the future. Suggested questions at the exit interview might include:

- What can we do to improve our internship program?
- Were the projects and tasks relevant to your major?
- Did you understand what was expected of you?
- Did you have enough access to your supervisor/mentor?
- What did you like most? Dislike most?

If you are considering hiring the intern for a full-time or part-time position, it is important to make this transition. It is not fair to the intern or co-workers to simply "extend the internship." Make the offer as you would to any employee, complete with a title change and a job description. As the person is now considered an employee with some degree of experience and more responsibility, it is normal practice to offer a pay raise when someone makes the leap from intern to employee.

### Research Based Internships

The California State University San Marcos Institutional Review Board (IRB) implements a review process established within the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) to ensure that human subject research complies with federal regulations, institutional policies, and ethical standards.<sup>1</sup>

Research based internships that will be conducted on campus are required to be reviewed and approved by the IRB before data collection can begin. For more information, please see: [CSUSM Institutional Review Board Overview](#).

### Checklist for Internship Site Supervisors

- ✓ Develop internship position description.

- ✓ Complete CSUSM's Academic Internship Program [partner application](#) online. If offering unpaid opportunities (including stipend or 1099 employment), a University Community Partnership Agreement will also be needed.
- ✓ Interview candidates/hire intern.
- ✓ Meet with intern to establish learning goals.
- ✓ Provide/supervise training of intern.
- ✓ Establish and conduct regularly scheduled supervision meetings.
- ✓ Provide end of internship evaluation, including completing an evaluation.

### Things to Consider Before Submitting the Partner Application

- ✓ Consult the [Fair Labor Standards Act](#) to help determine appropriate activities for interns.
- ✓ The intern should work in a professional setting with frequent interaction with and regular feedback from a supervisor/mentor.
- ✓ CSUSM students are not permitted to intern at any site associated with cannabis, tobacco, or vaping, or those that violate federal law or campus policy.
- ✓ Clerical and routine office duties should be kept to a minimum (less than 20%)
- ✓ Home-based businesses may be approved once required criteria are met. Furthermore, a site visit may be required but does not guarantee approval.
- ✓ The internship should avoid all conflicts of interest that can diminish the learning experience:
  - Students are not permitted to intern in family-owned businesses (in other words, if a member of their own family owns the business) or to be supervised by an immediate member of the family (i.e., father, mother, sibling).
  - Students are not permitted to intern at businesses in which their current faculty member has an ownership stake, nor should students have a current faculty member as their designated site supervisor.
  - Students may not transport clients/consumers of their field internship agency at any time for any reason.



- Students are not permitted to participate in door-to-door sales, telemarketing, or cold calling of any kind.
- Student interns that are not considered a W-2 employee cannot work 1:1 with minors unsupervised.

### **Intern Safety Orientation Checklist**

Your role as a community partner is to provide each intern with a safety orientation prior to the start of the internship. The following must be included in your safety orientation:

- ✓ Ensure a safe and appropriate learning environment by providing a safety orientation prior to starting the internship.
- ✓ Provide a site tour that includes locating all regular and emergency exits; identifying nearest evacuation points; and identifying best/fastest evacuation route when necessary (e.g., wildfire evacuation).
- ✓ Identify the location of emergency equipment on site, including fire extinguishers, AEDs and first aid kit(s), and providing directions on how to use them.
- ✓ Provide the intern with other applicable training(s) related to potential risks associated with the nature of the industry, organization, and internship opportunity.