



California State University

SAN MARCOS

ACADEMIC INTERNSHIPS

INTERNSHIP HANDBOOK

For Students

If you have questions that are not addressed, please contact the Career Center at (760) 750-7005 or 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.

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.

Benefits of an academic internship

- Gain professional experience and transferable skills
- Develop new skills and refine others
- Explore a prospective career path
- Earn academic credit
- Network with professionals in your field, for references and future job opportunities
- Gain a competitive edge on the job market or for post-baccalaureate studies

Earning academic credit for an internship

Many of CSUSM's academic departments offer credit-bearing internship courses; some are open to non-majors while others are required/restricted courses open only to students in those majors. To earn academic credit for an internship experience, you must be enrolled in an internship course. Please contact the faculty member of your internship course to determine course requirements, supplemental department forms/processes, recommended internship placement sites, major-specific internship credit limitations, and other pertinent guidance. If your department does not offer an internship course, [UNIV 495 is open to all majors](#) and satisfies university elective credits. However, you can ask your faculty advisor or department chair if they will approve these units toward your major elective credit.

How to find an internship

Finding the internship that is right for you is a three-step process: Determine Your Internship Goals, Prepare/Polish Your Job Search Skills, and Track Down Internship Sources.

Determine Your Internship Goals

Before you can even start thinking about finding an internship, you need to spend time reflecting on your goals for obtaining an internship. Consider these questions:

- **What are your specific career interests?** An internship is a great tool to help you define your career goals by exposing you to a particular field or industry to find out if the career you are considering is right for you. As important as classroom learning is, there is no substitute for witnessing and participating in the daily routine. Internships can help you become familiar with the duties of many different people in an organization, which can help narrow your focus and let you decide if the career you dream of is the right career for you.
- **Why do you want an internship and what do you hope to gain from it?** There are multiple reasons for obtaining an internship, including answering the question above. Other possible reasons include learning new skills, gaining networking connections, adding work experience to your résumé, and as an entry point that you hope leads to a full-time position with the employer when you graduate. Internships also offer flexibility since you and your site supervisor determine your work schedule.
- **What type of organization are you interested in?** Organizations come in all sizes and shapes, including public agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and businesses. What are you looking for? Issues to consider include size, ownership, mission/objective, etc.
- **Where do you want to have your internship?** If your internship is during the regular semester, you might need an internship close to campus, but during the summer months you may wish to have an internship out-of-state where you hope to land a full-time position when you graduate -- or just to experience a place in which you have never lived before. Keep in mind that out-of-state internships generally require advanced planning to arrange for travel, lodging and other logistics. Plan ahead!

Prepare/Polish Your Job Search Skills

As internships become more and more competitive, it becomes even more important for you to have a strong set of job-search skills from the below list.

- Cover letter writing
- Résumé preparation
- Interviewing strategies

Track down internship sources

If your department has an internship program, the first place to start is with the internship coordinator or faculty advisor in your own department. They may offer guidance and/or have a list of possible organizations. If you have an internship site in mind that is not on their list, discuss the possibility of getting approval for the organization you are interested in. Your faculty member may direct you to the Career Center for assistance in identifying placement sites.

How to land an internship

1. **Contact the organization** that you are interested in to set up an interview. Identify yourself as a _____ major (or student) at CSUSM. They will only know what you tell them about yourself, so it is important to express your qualifications in the most positive but realistic way. Remember, first impressions are important. Have a letter of introduction ready to send that includes the following:
 - a. A brief statement of interest in working in their organization with some background rationale if possible. (The rationale could include the connection between the internship setting and your career plans, your interest in the issues handled by the office, your unique skills which could be used, etc.).
 - b. A specific set of dates outlining the duration of the internship and the time commitment within that set of dates.
 - c. A brief statement of one's qualifications that highlight key elements of your formal résumé. Specific examples of one's abilities and skills are important. The organization may request a writing sample. It is appropriate to include this in the initial package.
 - d. A request for further guidance as to what other information the organization needs to make a decision.

2. **A formal résumé** is the traditional business method for presenting oneself. Although the résumé may be prepared for mass distribution, it is best when it is tailored to the specific application at hand. The more you know about the needs of a particular office, the more you can highlight what you have to offer. For a college student with limited work experience, the résumé is slightly different than for a person in the working world. Target your résumé to a particular position and highlight the relevant experiences and skills for that job. The résumé should include:
 - Biographical and contact information, e.g., current address, telephone number, email, etc.
 - An outline of specific skills, e.g., letter writing, research, statistics, computer work, public polling, computer skills, etc.
 - Previous employment

- Education record
- Academic experiences that indicate skills and the ability to work independently
- References (choose references from those who are most likely to tell something about your ability to do the job and from those who are likely to carry some weight with the potential sponsor)
- Career plans

Make sure the cover letter and résumé are error free and professional. Do not rely solely on your spell checker or your own eyes. Have someone else proofread for you.

3. **Arrange an interview:** Many internship partners require either an in-person or phone interview. Prepare for the interview by finding out as much as possible about the interviewer and their office operation and anticipating their questions, i.e., tell me about yourself, why do you want to work here, what skills would you bring to the job, what are your most important strengths/weaknesses. Also, have some questions of your own, i.e., what kinds of assignments can I expect to get, what did your last (current) intern do, what do you expect of interns, etc. Questions not only allow you to gather valuable information, but also indicate your interest. At a minimum, ask what their timetable is for making a hiring decision. Immediately send a follow-up thank you letter to the interviewer. This serves as a subtle reminder that they need to take action and signals to the interviewer your professionalism and commitment to following through.
 - Be **flexible** about your work schedules and assignments.
 - Be **specific** about your interests.
 - Be **realistic** about possible placements.

You are offered an internship, what next?

Let your faculty supervisor know immediately. In addition to informing you about how to register for course credit, your faculty supervisor will develop a learning agreement that clarifies the expected work to be done, the learning outcomes, the logistics, and specific number of hours per unit of academic credit to be granted upon the successful completion of the internship course.

Consult with your faculty supervisor for any documentation your academic department requires. Additionally, the following documents must be completed and uploaded to the Career Center via the [Internship Database](#) *prior* to the start of your internship.

- Placement and guidelines
- Liability release form (if under 18 years or if no University Community Partnership agreement is on file with the Career Center. The Career Center will advise you on whether you need this).
- Syllabus or learning plan/agreement developed in consultation with your faculty supervisor that clearly specifies for what work you will do, what you are expected to learn, expected number of hours, etc.
- Complete the Student Orientation Module to review safety and emergency procedures, and successfully pass the quiz to demonstrate your full understanding.

Frequently asked questions

- **Am I eligible for an internship?**
 - Contact your department internship coordinator or department chair to inquire about eligibility requirements as they may vary by department.
- **Are internships paid or unpaid?**
 - Both. Some are paid and others are not. Many non-profit organizations are unable to pay their interns; however, non-profits can offer very good site training.
- **How many credits can I earn for an internship?**
 - An internship that spans one semester is generally taken for 3 credits, but it is possible to earn fewer or more credits, depending on your academic department.
 - Talk to your faculty supervisor about specific department guidelines on how many credits you can earn.
- **How much time is required?**
 - A 3-unit internship is generally 90-120 hours, but this can vary by academic department. Your supervising faculty can best answer this question.
- **Are academic internships graded?**
 - Yes. Students participating in an academic internship are either graded credit/no credit, or with a letter grade, depending on your department. Your supervising faculty will tell you how it is graded.
- **When can I start an internship?**
 - You may start your internship once you have completed the student placement which includes a learning plan, emergency contact info, etc., via the [internship database](#), and you have completed the Student Orientation Module.
- **How do I find an internship?**
 - Begin by talking to your faculty advisor or Department Chair to familiarize yourself with the department criteria and expectations. Search the University's [internship database](#) for opportunities. [Handshake](#) may be a useful source for finding paid internships. It may also be possible to suggest an internship site to your faculty advisor for consideration.
- **Can I intern at a site that is not listed in the database or on Handshake?**
 - Only if the proposed site signs a University Community Partnership Agreement, and/or the internship is paid and meets minimum wage laws. First, ask your faculty supervisor if your proposed site is appropriate for the major. If approved, fill out the [Request for Community Partner](#) at least 4-6 weeks before you plan to direct students to the site, or no later than August 1 (Fall semester) or December 1 (Spring semester).
- **Is it okay to intern for a family member?**
 - No. To avoid a conflict of interest, you may not intern with family members.
- **Can I intern with an organization I already work for?**
 - It may be possible to earn internship credit at your current place of employment if your work responsibilities meet the criteria for an academic internship in your chosen career field. However, your faculty supervisor or department chair must approve.

- **Can I receive credit for an internship I already completed?**
 - No. Internships cannot be approved retroactively for credit. Like any academic coursework, an internship requires faculty supervision, learning objectives, and regular feedback.
- **I am not sure how to complete the student placement process.**
 - You can find clear instructions on our [website](#) under the student tab by clicking on “credit internships.”
- **My department doesn’t offer an internship course.**
 - [UNIV 495 is open to all majors](#). However, only your faculty advisor or department chair can approve these units to count toward your major.

Intern Responsibilities

- Be professional.
- Report to work when scheduled.
- Notify your site supervisor if you cannot be at work.
- Keep you site supervisor informed about what you are working on.
- Take appropriate safety precautions if working around people and equipment.
- Inform your faculty supervisor immediately of any concerns you may have in your internship workplace.

Forms (Electronically Submitted to the Career Center)

To reduce and mitigate risk for all parties involved, it is important that the following documents are completed via the [Internship Database](#) *prior* to starting the internship.

- Student placement documents.
- Liability release form (when student is under 18 years of age, a parent or legal guardian must sign the document).
- Syllabus or learning plan/agreement developed in consultation with your faculty supervisor that clearly specifies for what work you will do, what you are expected to learn, expected number of hours, etc.

Things to Consider in Your Internship Experience

- Contact the Career Center immediately if you experience workplace discrimination or sexual harassment. (760) 750-7005.
- Interns should be in a professional setting with frequent interaction with and regular feedback from a supervisor/mentor.
- The internship should avoid all conflicts of interest that can diminish the learning experience.
- Students are not permitted to intern at any site associated with cannabis, tobacco, or vaping, or those that violate federal law or campus policy.
- Interns are not permitted to intern in family-owned businesses (in other words 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).
- Clerical and routine office duties should be kept to a minimum; no more than 20%.
- Interns 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.

Checklist for Interns

- ✓ You have completed and submitted any required forms to your academic department and have completed the required student placement in the [internship database](#).
- ✓ If you are an international student or a student interning abroad, you have contacted the Office of Global Education (760) 750-4090 to obtain work authorization and consult about travel and medical insurance.
- ✓ You have met with your faculty supervisor to develop a learning agreement.
- ✓ You have met with your site supervisor to discuss their expectations from you.
- ✓ You have completed the online Student Orientation Module and quiz.
- ✓ You satisfy the hour requirement and complete expected assignments.