

Internship Opportunities At A Regional Campus

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Students choose to attend the regional campuses for a variety of reasons: convenience, cost, size, friends, being unsure of what they want to do, etc. For many, their expectations about what can be done beyond the traditional classroom work is minimal. The assumption has been that extracurricular activities and additional academic opportunities are not available on a regional campus. That view is not always accurate.

Retention of students is a major concern for most universities and colleges today. Faculty cannot attend a conference dealing with students that does not have sessions addressing this issue. Much of the current research on this issue suggests that students need to make a personal connection. Another way of making connections is finding a place that offers opportunities that will enhance their job possibilities or admission to graduate school. At Kent State—Stark one of the ways we have tried to address this is through the development of internship programs in a variety of areas.

Practical Experience

Internships are a great way for students to gain practical experience in their chosen field and to apply what they have learned in the classroom. These opportunities give students the chance to test the waters a bit to see if the type of job experienced in the internship is really what they want to do for the rest of their lives. Some schools offer these chances to only graduate students, but having a chance to gain some experience a bit earlier can help people make wiser decisions about their futures. Internships can also open the door for possible future employment by providing opportunities for networking and introducing students to professionals in their fields.

Internships are a good recruiting tool for a school as well as offering opportunities to businesses which want to have a hand in the training

of future employees. Internship programs also work nicely with the mission of regional campuses to establish connections with their communities. Here at Kent—Stark we provide internships in a variety of majors ranging from history, English, business, and journalism to psychology. Some are provided through the departments while others are offered through the Honors Program.

The first step, and an ongoing one, is establishing contacts within the community to find suitable places for interns. Not every business or job is right. One of the key factors is finding places that can support and properly supervise interns so they are not thrown in to sink or swim on their own. Many places are interested because interns are generally not paid, but that does not mean such positions are all suitable.

Many places are often not equipped to deal with interns. For example, there are sites that have only one employee or owner. Such sites do not have the time to properly train and supervise an intern. Instead, these sites are usually looking for free labor to help cut down the existing workload. Another example would be a place where the tasks outlined for an intern lean toward the strictly secretarial, copying, mailings, making coffee, etc. An intern will learn about office politics but little else with this type of experience. Sites that do not have enough work prepared for an intern should not be chosen. Students want to do an internship because they wish to learn about the particular business. They do not expect to arrive at their job and be told to either go home or just wait. Most students are too busy to waste their time in this fashion.

The best internships are created where there is a sincere desire on the part of the particular site to teach students. Whoever the supervisor is going to be, he or she needs to be someone who is willing to share his or her expertise with a student. Often, the appropriate people are those who had the chance to participate in an internship when they were in school. Sometimes the appropriate people can be those who want to pass on to others what they wish they had been taught before going out to look for a job in their chosen field. The best supervisors also realize that at times things may not be done as quickly as they would like because there is a learning process involved. If the learning process is not available, then chances are good the internship will be less than successful.

After establishing an initial contact to determine interest, the

supervising faculty should schedule meetings and discuss expectations and roles. The campus needs to be clear about what it expects and be ready for feedback from potential sites about their needs. Among the many appropriate questions, questions concern what the intern would be doing and when. Who would be supervising? How flexible will they be with hours since the interns are in school? What will the interns learn?

The Process

It is not necessary to wait until instructors have a student making enquiries before beginning canvassing possible sites. Having a list of potential placements when students come to inquire makes the process move forward more quickly and smoothly. If the instructor has a list of potential sites, it will be easier to match the interests of the student and the businesses. This procedure is important to the success of any internship. For example, if a student is looking for an internship in which he or she will be involved in financial planning, then placing him or her at a site that does strictly accounting work may not be the best fit.

After a student indicates interest, it is important to have some discussion with the student to determine why he or she wishes to do the internship and how it will fit his or her academic plans. This consideration will probably involve some dialogue with an academic advisor to be sure that an internship can be designed into the particular program or major. Some programs do not always have the flexibility to create internships or a course number does not exist for such a class and would need to be created. Then the instructor should discuss with the student what type of internship is of interest—what does the student hope to get out of this experience? Often this response requires some prompting and prodding to encourage the student to talk about career plans. It is helpful to learn as much as possible to try to match students with a site that most closely fits their plans. For example, if a history student wants to learn about designing exhibits, it will probably not be a good fit to place him or her at a site looking for tour guides only.

What do you look for in a student? First and foremost, the student should be self-motivated. Next, the student needs to have a sincere interest in learning. In other words, a student who simply wants to do

an internship to fill out a schedule is probably not ready to be sent out. Students also need to have the time in their schedules to devote to an internship. A student taking a full course load and working full-time will probably not be able to spend enough time at any site to make it worthwhile. Students who are juniors and seniors often work out better because of their maturity and the background of classes they have taken. It also helps if the instructor checks on the student's academic progress. Students who are on or near probation tend to be the students who do not show up regularly for their internship.

Paperwork

Paperwork should be kept to a minimum for everyone involved. This consideration is particularly important from the site supervisor's view. Often, site supervisors will not have time to fill out extensive forms and may decide to withdraw their initial interest if there is a great deal of extra paperwork. Supervising and teaching an intern will already be adding to the busy schedules at the site. Sample copies of some of the paperwork I use are included in the Appendices.

The paperwork includes a contract, a list of expectations and responsibilities, and an evaluation form. Everyone involved in the internship should receive copies of all forms. Supervisors should also know that they will be asked to write a letter for the student's file when the internship is complete.

Meetings should be arranged periodically with the interns to see how things are going. Consulting gives them a chance to tell you about their experiences and to ask questions. It also gives you an opportunity to hear about what they are doing and prevent any problems before they develop. Prevention should involve going to the site to see what the student is doing as well as meeting with him or her separately. Contacting the site supervisor at least once during the internship is a good idea just to insure that everyone is pleased with the progress being made. Having students write a final reflective paper on their experience is also helpful to everyone. The student gets the chance to think critically about the overall experience, and both the faculty member and site supervisor get an opportunity to read about issues that could be changed for future interns. This paper should be a part of the requirements for

the completion of the internship.

Internship programs at the undergraduate level provide a great opportunity for students to explore future careers and to learn about themselves in the process. When an internship works well, the student and everyone benefits from the partnership, including the university or college. An ideal internship needs to have plenty of supervision, someone excited about the prospect of working with an intern, and a variety of tasks to be accomplished. If a student comes to the site to work and there is nothing to do, he or she easily becomes discouraged. At the same time the best students are those who are self-motivated, who come seeking out the internship, and are truly interested in learning and not just putting in time. If these factors are present, then the chances of creating a successful experience for all parties is greatly enhanced.

Appendices

Appendix A

Internship Completion Form

The following signatures indicate that

_____ has satisfactorily

fulfilled the expectations of the internship.

Site _____

Number of hours completed _____

Student signature _____ date _____

Site supervisor signature _____ date _____

Faculty signature _____ date _____

Appendix B

Internship Agreement

This document verifies that the Stark Campus, the internship site, and the student have discussed and agreed to the following expectations for this internship. All parties will receive a signed copy for their records.

1. There will be no financial remuneration associated with this internship. Placement and work is voluntary.
2. Students are typically placed for one semester, though internships can be renewed for a second.
3. Students are expected to work between 90-110 hours during the 15 weeks.
4. Scheduling of work time will be set up between the student and site supervisor.
5. The faculty advisor assumes all responsibility for the administrative aspects: site selection, assignment, and grading.
6. The faculty member will visit the internship site and be available for questions or problems that arise.
7. The site must designate someone as the site supervisor.
8. The supervisor needs to provide adequate supervision and tasks for the intern.
9. The supervisor will complete a letter of evaluation.
10. The supervisor will report to the faculty instructor if there are problems that develop with attendance, work ethic, etc.
11. The faculty advisor will provide the students with relevant learning materials that may assist in their work.
12. The student will keep a daily journal and write a final reflective paper at the end of the internship.
13. The student will be responsible for letting the site supervisor know of any changes in scheduled work times and clearing it with them.

Appendix C

Supervisor Evaluation form

Intern _____ Date _____

Site _____ Supervisor _____

Brief statement about the nature of the assignment and the overall intern performance:

Rating and Assessment: Based upon your observations, please rate the intern in the following areas.

		High				Low
1. Professionalism	N/A	5	4	3	2	1
2. Cooperation with colleagues	N/A	5	4	3	2	1
3. Responsible behavior	N/A	5	4	3	2	1
4. Ethical behavior	N/A	5	4	3	2	1
5. Use of resources, etc., for professional growth	N/A	5	4	3	2	1
6. Ability to follow directions	N/A	5	4	3	2	1
7. Leadership qualities	N/A	5	4	3	2	1
8. Overall rating of intern	N/A	5	4	3	2	1

Any other comments or suggestions to share about this intern?

Appendix D

Internship Evaluation Form

Intern _____ Date _____

Site _____ Supervisor _____

1. Was there sufficient information shared about the internship before you actually began?
2. Was the setting appropriate for your learning expectations?
3. Did the internship supervisor provide adequate advising and other help as needed?
4. Were the working conditions provided suitable for your project (s)?
5. Were your duties and responsibilities clearly laid out for you? If not, what could have been done differently?
6. Do you feel this was a valuable learning experience—why or why not?

Biography

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