

SUCCEEDING IN AN INTERNSHIP

Hegi Family Career Development Center

Southern Methodist University

*An **Internship** can offer valuable experience into how an industry or organization works.*

It's a way for students to:

- ◆ *Explore jobs and career fields*
- ◆ *Learn about the world of work*
- ◆ *Put classroom lessons into action*

Internships are valuable because:

- ◆ *They enable a student to establish a work history*
- ◆ *Create a network in her/his field of study*
- ◆ *Set a foundation for full-time employment*

Employers expect students to complete at least one internship, preferably more, before they graduate.

WHAT IS AN INTERNSHIP?

An **internship** is any **career-related experience** you are involved in. It might be a summer job, a semester-long class assignment, or a community service project. You may get paid, or you may obtain school credit. Whatever the experience, if you are gaining knowledge and developing skills which you can apply to your future career, it can be considered an internship.

And if you “play your cards right”, your internship could potentially turn into a successful career. By treating your internship like a professional “job”, you can gain experience, make connections, and have an advantage over other candidates when it comes time to apply for a full-time position.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

It allows you to **familiarize yourself** with an industry of interest. If you can't decide whether you want to work in the corporate sector, in non-profit, in academia, in government, or in health care, internships are an excellent way for you to “figure that out”.

As you explore your options and gain internship experience in various fields, you will be able to **begin refining** your career and work preferences.

Interning **puts you in touch with people** who can become mentors, members of your network and potential full-time contacts.

You will **develop marketable skills** necessary for future employment, including:

- ◆ *communication*
- ◆ *initiative*
- ◆ *teamwork*
- ◆ *organization*

An internship **helps to build experience** necessary for your resume and eventual job search.

You might end up keeping that internship for the next semester or following summer. It may also very well **turn into your first full-time** job post graduation!

A NOTE ABOUT *FOR-CREDIT* INTERNSHIPS

Certain SMU majors require you to complete internships for credit. While opportunities may be posted on MustangTrak, the paperwork necessary to ensure that you receive proper / academic credit is processed through the academic departments, *not* the Career Center. It is important that you contact faculty for more information.

Employers may want to offer credit for their internships, but again, the process needs to be administered by an academic department.

PREPARATION

LOCATE AN INTERNSHIP

- **Meet with a Career Counselor:** discuss your interests, take personality/interest career assessments, discuss career goals and options, explore possibilities, learn practical skills to help you succeed in your search and on the job.
- **MustangTRAK:** create a profile in the system to search for a variety of positions across numerous industries.
- **Target companies:** if you have a specific company in mind, search their Web site for internship opportunities, application instructions, and deadlines. Arrange informational interviews whenever possible.
- **Network:** tell everyone you know that you are seeking an internship (parents, friends, friends' parents, faculty, campus mentors etc.). You never know how someone is connected to someone else or what information they may have to help you.

WHAT YOU NEED

- **Resume:** before you meet with a career counselor or begin your job search, draft a professional, one-page resume. This is one of the single most important documents you will create, so be sure to exert sufficient time and effort. A resume highlights your objective, education, skills, and work/leadership experience. You may find a resume writing guide on the *Students* page accessible through the Hegi Family Career Development Center homepage, www.smu.edu/career.
- **Cover Letter:** a cover letter should be submitted with your resume. Even when an employer does not specifically request a cover letter, it is recommended to send one. This one-page letter clearly and concisely states the position to which you are applying, highlights your most relevant work/leadership experiences, and explains based on your experiences/skills why you are qualified for a specific position. You may find a resume writing guide on the *Students* page accessible through the Hegi Family Career Development Center homepage, www.smu.edu/career.
- **Mock Interviews:** visit the career center for a mock interview. A career counselor will walk you through the typical interview process, common interview questions and response strategies, and provide feedback on your interviewing strengths and areas for improvement.
- **References:** before applying for a position, identify three individuals who can speak in support of your professional experiences and/or academic performance. Family and friends are **not** acceptable references. It is best to use current/former supervisors and/or faculty. Be sure to first ask these individuals if they are willing to serve as a reference and provide them with a copy of the job description(s) to which you are applying.

HOW TO APPLY

- **Application instructions will vary among employers.** Some may allow students to submit through MustangTRAK, others may require that students apply through their company Web site or directly to a human resources contact. Read each job description carefully for complete instructions.
- **Start early.** Some summer internships have fall deadlines, while others are in the spring. If you are planning for a summer internship, start your search during the fall semester.

EXCEL ON THE JOB

PROFESSIONALISM

- **Be punctual:** make it a habit to be at least 15 minutes early to work everyday.
- **Firm Handshake:** never underestimate the importance of a firm handshake with eye contact.
- **Appropriate Attire:** learn what is appropriate for your office. As a rule of thumb, ragged jeans, flip flops, t-shirts, low-cut blouses, skirts above your knee, and shorts are considered inappropriate for a work environment. If you want to be treated as a professional, dress as a professional.
- **Work Ethic:** always strive to produce high quality work, stay on task, ask for projects, and meet deadlines.
- **Exceed Expectations:** go the extra mile and be enthusiastic. Set goals, take advantage of all opportunities to learn, take initiative, and don't be afraid to ask questions.

COMMUNICATION

- **Define expectations:** meet with your manager as soon as possible, discuss his/her expectations for you, set goals, and share what you hope to gain from your experience.
- **Regular meetings:** set regular meetings with your manager to discuss your progress and growth. This will give you an opportunity to also express interest in new/other initiatives.
- **Network:** meet as many people as possible in your company's various departments. Ask questions about the company, industry, and individuals' positions. This will help you gain a broader understanding of the company and build your professional connections.

SHOW YOUR WORK

- **Ask for copies of your projects:** keeping copies of your work will build your professional portfolio, which you will use in future interviews.
- **Ask for Feedback:** Meet with your manager to discuss strengths, areas of improvement, and be sure to ask for a letter of recommendation at the conclusion of your internship.

DID YOU KNOW?

- **61 %** of college graduates hired last year had previously held internships.
- Approximately **85%** of employment opportunities are obtained through networking.
- **Communication** is consistently ranked as the top skill sought by employers.

AFTER THE INTERNSHIP

Depending on the employer, you may very well be evaluated on your performance, particularly if your internship is for credit. Areas that will be measured may include:

- ◆ ability to learn
- ◆ listening and communication skills
- ◆ creative thinking and problem solving skills
- ◆ professional and career development skills
- ◆ interpersonal and teamwork skills
- ◆ basic work habits
- ◆ industry-specific skills
- ◆ overall performance

Whether or not you receive credit for your internship, it is always worthwhile to reflect on your experience to determine what you learned. Things to think about:

- ◆ knowledge and skills you gained
- ◆ areas of personal and professional growth
- ◆ new or confirmed areas of interest
- ◆ goals—did you meet them? If not, why not?
- ◆ ability to function as part of a team
- ◆ ability to make good use of supervision

REMEMBER...

One of the most important things to remember is to **connect your internship experience to your career development**. Add it to your resume! And use it to help you make decisions about your career direction.

Remember also that opportunities exist for **ALL** majors, so be sure to visit with a career counselor to get started on a plan of action.

A PLACE TO START

MustangTrak www.smu.edu/career/mustangtrak.asp

ExxonMobil Community Summer Jobs Program http://hoe.exxonmobil.com/Corporate/community_ed_csjp.aspx

Inroads www.inroads.org

InternJobs www.internjobs.com

InternWeb www.internweb.com

HEGI FAMILY CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

200 Hughes-Trigg Student Center

214-768-2266 (phone)

214-768-4292 (fax)

Visit us anytime at www.smu.edu/career