



Skill Development

Determining if an Internship is Right for You

Too often students share stories of how they were let down by a particular internship, ending the account of their story with a, “I wish I had known beforehand what the internship would really be like” sentiment. You of course want to give serious consideration to whether or not an internship is right for you before you accept an offer - but where do you begin? This tip-sheet provides evaluation criteria that should be used before accepting an internship. If offered an internship with a prestigious organization, don't assume that you can forego the evaluation process because that internship will automatically be a great experience! There is a great deal of variability in how internships are structured – it's always best to consider in advance how a particular experience will fit with your personality, career goals, and values.

Applicable Career Communities:



Before Accepting an Internship Offer

What have you heard?

Perhaps the easiest way to get started is by listening to your friends, classmates, coworkers, and acquaintances. If you're in a similar field of study as your friend who just had an incredible internship, then you might benefit from hearing about that internship. The colloquial things you hear from day to day can be key ingredients in the evaluation process. If someone shares a story about an unsatisfactory internship experience, this could be the first sign that it isn't a good option for you.

This is only the preliminary step. While hearing good things about an internship may pique your initial interest, it is still necessary for you to pay attention to and analyze all aspects of any internship to determine how well it will support your career goals, provide skill-building experiences, etc.

Who would be your office contact, mentor, or supervisor?

There should be at least one person at the internship who would be assigned to work with you and guide

you. Having a contact, mentor, or supervisor (the title may differ from one workplace to another) will be, perhaps, the most crucial element in having a meaningful and rewarding internship experience.

Meeting with the supervisor before taking an offer provides you a critical opportunity to gauge whether or not you will be able to work well together.

What would be your hours, schedule, and pay? Would you be receiving academic credit for your internship?

Internships may take place at any time throughout the year, so you may have a number of conflicting obligations to handle. For instance, you might be taking classes, traveling, or participating in summer programs. It is crucial to have some estimate beforehand of what your hours and schedule will look like in order to ensure that your responsibilities and activities won't overlap.

Moreover, when you are preparing to accept a paid internship, it is important to know what your wages will be, especially if you are in any way relying on

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your earnings to cover cost of living expenses. For this reason, **you should request that an offer be given in writing**, so that the terms agreed upon are clear and consistent over the span of your internship.

If you wish to receive academic credit from Ohio State for your internship, be sure to work closely with your specific academic department as requirements and registration process vary across the College of Arts and Sciences. If your department does not offer credit for internships, you may be able to enroll in one of the internships courses through the ASC Center for Career and Professional Success. Please see the student section of Career Success' website artsandsciences.osu.edu/career-success/students to find more detailed information.

What are your expectations?

Although you might be tempted to accept an internship as soon as it is offered, it is important to first reflect on your expectations. A number of questions ought to be considered, such as: "What do I hope to learn?"; "Is this the field I'm interested in pursuing?"; "Do I feel comfortable doing the kind of work that will be expected of me?" In addition, you should ask yourself how the experience will contribute to your future plans.

This could mean thinking about something as concrete as how the internship will add to your resume:

- What skills might you gain from the internship?
- Will you be largely doing clerical work, instead of specific projects?
- Is the department doing the kind of work that you are eager to do?

Before you accept an internship offer, you should be in possession of a fair amount of information concerning what responsibilities you will take on during the internship. If you do not feel you have the information you need to address these questions, request more information from your contact, mentor, or supervisor. If they cannot provide additional insight, then you are encouraged to be somewhat skeptical of the internship that has been offered.

Declining an Internship Offer

For whatever reason, if you decide not to accept the offer of an internship, be sure to be polite. This organization dedicated time and resources toward carefully selecting you from a likely sizable pool of applicants. Keep in mind that if you become interested in working with this company in subsequent years, a cordial decline will serve you better than having never replied to their offer.

Things to Look Out for During an Internship

Do your experiences align with what you were led to expect?

An internship should provide experiences that are consistent with what were described during the interview process. This means, for example, not being asked to do excessive clerical or errand work. Spending over 20% of your time on such tasks from week to week would be considered excessive.

Do you feel comfortable and productive? Being able to participate in a healthy and professional working environment is a key component to a good internship. This requires an environment that fosters respect. Such respect is fostered primarily by the attitudes and actions of those from whom students are learning - primarily those who train and mentor them - but also from other coworkers.

Adherence to the regulations of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) is crucial. See the following for more information:

<https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.pdf>

The FLSA guidelines were developed to prevent employers from taking advantage of student trainees, and serve as a reference point when evaluating if a particular organization is engaging in unfair practices. Generally, an organization is not required to pay you as long as there is a balance between what the organization gains from your

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intern labor and the education that you derive from the experience.

A common violation of FLSA is when an organization requires unpaid interns to do the same work as those on the organization's payroll, without providing any form of workplace education to the interns. This practice has diminished in recent years as more organizations now recognize that it is essential to place students in environments where they can learn best practices and procedures through observation and/or structured training programs.

As an intern, your goals should be to learn, take initiative, and pay attention to the details of your work – positioning yourself for consideration when the organization has a full-time opening. It should not be your responsibility to make sure your employer adheres to labor or equality laws.

No organization should ever take advantage of you and your time, or ask you to work in unsafe conditions.

If able and comfortable doing so, reach out to your internship contact, mentor, or supervisor to discuss any concerns that you have.

Helpful Resources

Handshake

handshake.osu.edu

Check out what your peers at Ohio State and other college campuses have to say about their experiences at various organizations.

Glassdoor

<http://www.glassdoor.com/index.htm>

See anonymous employee reviews, salaries, and more for thousands of companies.

Vault

<http://www.vault.com/internship-rankings/>

Vault surveyed thousands of current and former interns about their internship programs and keeps the responses in a database that is free to use.

Grievance Process

Students who are currently in or have been through unsatisfactory internships can enter into an unofficial grievance process to address their experiences. The first course of action should of course be internal. As advised above, engaging your internship contact, mentor or supervisor is the best initial step.

You are also encouraged to reach out to ASC Career Success for guidance to best advocate for yourself and/or assistance in connecting with additional resources specific to your concerns. Schedule an appointment with a Career Coach by logging into [Handshake](#). A coach can help you sort through options that you are considering as well as suggest actions to take when you feel aggrieved.

Students who are receiving academic credit for an internship should contact their academic advisor.

Again, remember that you should never feel that the conditions under which you are serving as an intern at an organization place you in an environment that compromises your mental or physical wellbeing.

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