

Virtual Internship Guidelines

As adapted from The Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions, "What to do about internships in light of the COVID-19 pandemic? A short guide to online internships for colleges, students, and employers" and the University of Portland "Virtual internship Guidelines"

Virtual internships, when properly delivered can be a rewarding experience for both the student and the employer. For companies and organizations that are considering hosting virtual internships for the summer of 2020, here are some suggestions:

The following are guidelines and best practices for virtual internship positions.

1. **Student interns benefit from tasks being contextualized.** Rather than just assigning "to do" deliverables, communicate why the work is important. *What is it contributing towards or connected to? How will this task contribute to the greater good of the project/department/organization?*
2. **This may be the first time your intern has worked in an independent work environment** which necessitates such high levels of self-motivation and personal organizational skills. The more support and tools you equip them with in this new environment, the more easily they will adapt.
3. **Allocate enough time before the start of the virtual internship to:**
 - a. Select and test the right software for managing work
 - b. Staff training to use the new software/systems (if students are expected to use new software or
 - c. information technology, it should be provided free-of-charge)
 - d. Develop a work plan for the intern, training materials, activities and tools that the intern will need to be successful in the role
 - e. Clearly define expectations for both the intern and the supervisor/mentor. These need to be agreed upon before the start of the internship. Goals and expectations should be reinforced on a regular basis
4. **It is essential that all tasks and projects are carefully prepared and planned** in order for the virtual intern will be able to manage the work effectively by themselves. The creation of a written workplan that covers the entirety of the experience is suggested
5. **Because the intern will not have the opportunity** to have the everyday interactions of the workplace, the materials, instructions and task descriptions need to be well prepared and available online so that they have access to that information when it is needed
6. **For the supervisor, it is suggested that you engage the rest of your team** in the delivery of the virtual internship experience. By doing this the intern will have the opportunity to interact with several individuals throughout the course of the experience. Team members need to be committed and available to engage with virtual interns on a daily basis (and sometimes multiple times a day)
7. **Create and deliver a well-balanced experience** for your intern that includes the opportunity for the intern to:
 - a. Learn about your organization

- b. Focus on professional development
- c. Engage in meaningful projects and work that will help to develop their overall ability to become a valuable team member in the future

An in-depth review of a properly structured virtual internship:

1. **Defined Learning Goals.** Prior to the internship, students must identify 4-6 learning goals to be completed during the course of the internship. They could incorporate desired industry-related knowledge, skills, and abilities required for successful career advancement. Supervisors will work with the intern at the beginning of the internship to develop a plan to ensure that the established goals are met and check in regularly throughout the internship to see if the intern is on track to meet these goals.
2. **Thorough onboarding and orientation.** In order for the intern to get oriented and established in their new working environment, supervisors should plan for the intern's first day on the job to be focused on orientation and training. This should consist of: meeting other staff members, learning about the organization, reviewing organization-wide communication standards and workplace expectations (including taking required legal breaks, lunches, and system of tracking hours), and reviewing the student's defined learning goals. If this orientation will not be completed in- person, a synchronous meeting platform should be used for orientation, in addition to electronic written documentation. This will provide the intern the chance to ask clarifying questions, as this might be their first professional work environment, and is likely their first virtually based position.
3. **Timely Feedback.** Similar to online learning environments, supervisors should review intern deliverables and provide timely feedback to students on a regular basis. Supervisors are asked to schedule feedback meetings for a minimum of thirty minutes each week to engage in direct mentorship with the student regarding their progress towards learning outcomes and areas of professional development.
4. **Pre-planned training** topics should also be discussed during these sessions. Synchronous meeting platforms should be used for this portion of the internship, including video conferencing or telephone, not email or messaging platforms.
5. **Consistent Communication.** Summative feedback should be provided consistently at least once per week. This includes an update on expected work activities for the week, outcomes from prior work submissions, and other relevant announcements pertaining to the organization. A good practice is to schedule a regular email report around or on the same day each week.
6. **Pre-arranged Schedules.** Although a key feature of remote internships is the flexibility of the work schedule, supervisors and interns should agree upon a definitive time allotment per week and per day for internship activities. Defining the amount of accrued time allotted for any given task - are strongly recommended to avoid unreasonable work demands on the student and any conflict with reported internship hours. If a defined work schedule and/or shift cap is not established, disputes may result as to how long tasks took the student to perform.

7. **Organizational Involvement.** In addition to facilitating a remote or virtual internship, site supervisors should make a good faith effort to integrate the intern into the organization's work culture. After initial onboarding orientation, this may include client visits and attendance at select team meetings, use of company tools and resources, and any other forms of access to other staff members.
8. **Reimbursement of Expenses.** Students engaged in virtual internships should not incur any personal expenses as a result of the internships "remote" status. Any such costs, including the purchase of software and hardware for the purposes of the internship, should be covered by the internship host site, or alternative arrangements provided to the student prior to starting the internship.

