

ORGANIZING AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Work-study or internship (WS/I) programs are designed to give college students an opportunity to complement their formal education with career-related experience. Historically these programs have been initiated by universities as a formal part of their curriculum, however more and more students and businesses are taking an active role in organizing these beneficial programs.

In order to compete in today's professional environment, students often need more than just a college degree. The lengthening periods of formal education for growing numbers of young people have changed the work/education pattern. In addition, businesses are putting pressure on schools to better prepare students for the actual requirements of their first position. These factors have created an increasing demand from students and universities for more and better internship experiences.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) supports work-study and internship programs because they help prepare students to work effectively in the business world after graduation. Gaining real-world experience also helps the participants to make more informed career choices which will result in higher job satisfaction and higher productivity.

SHRM developed this guidebook to assist its professional and student chapters to create new internship opportunities and to improve upon existing programs for the mutual benefit of all participants. One goal of the Society's student membership program is to increase the number of work-study and internship experiences available in human resource management (HRM). A greater number of internship opportunities will result in better placement of HRM graduates, and a higher level of experience and professionalism among these entry-level workers.

This "how-to" guide outlines the steps necessary to create a successful internship or work-study program. It lists both the responsibilities and the benefits for each participant; the SHRM chapter, the university, the employer, and the student. Please use this information as a model in developing or enhancing your own work-study or internship programs.

ORGANIZATION

The terms "work-study" and "internship" are sometimes used interchangeably. They refer to a variety of programs which provide college students with practical work experience as part of a formal education program leading to a degree. This form of learning helps students to synthesize classroom theory with real-life practice.

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Types of programs

Work-study or internship programs are generally categorized as:

1. Full-time or part-time.
2. Paid or unpaid.
3. Credit or non-credit.

Programs can be designed to accommodate a variety of company needs and student schedules. Some of the typical structures include:

Parallel plan Students both attend classes and work during the day.

Evening plan Students attend evening classes and work full or part-time during the day.

Alternate plan/Co-op Students attend school full-time one semester, or two quarters, then work full-time the next semester (or two quarters), thus alternating periods of work and school until their college programs are completed.

Ways in which interns are employed

- Assisting more experienced employees.
- Completing short-term assignments where adding an additional full-time employee is not practical.
- Assisting during peak load periods of work.
- Acting as technical assistants on research teams- conducting literature searches, routine testing, sampling, mathematical calculations, and flow charts.

In a survey of students participating in work-study or internship programs, the majority chose their internship based on the content, work objective, and project to be completed. Most students participated in the program to gain practical work experience in their chosen career fields. The majority of arrangements were short-term, just one or two semesters in length, and the average time spent each week in WS/I activities was 25 hours.

Typical projects assigned during HRM internships

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- Designing and implementing a salary survey.
- Writing job descriptions.
- Developing an exit questionnaire.
- Monitoring pertinent legislation pending.
- Assisting with affirmative action projects.
- Conducting telephone surveys.
- Assisting in job interviews and follow-up.
- Observing & assisting in contract and labor negotiations.
- Writing operating procedures in compliance with federal laws.
- Developing and implementing employee training programs.
- Implementing and conducting training on HRIS systems.

Pitfalls to avoid

The vast majority of students who participate in work-study or internship programs report that such programs provide excellent experience and the opportunity to develop valuable business contacts. In occasional cases, however, the program lacks structure and the assignments provided are not challenging enough or the direct supervision provided is inadequate. In such cases, the students may have difficulty accomplishing their work and learning objectives, which could result in dissatisfaction on the part of the student and/or the employer.

Some student interns report dissatisfaction resulting from the lack of a formal evaluation of their performance. When constructive feedback is given, the internship experience can be used to help students identify weaknesses and to begin to correct them before starting a permanent position. To do this effectively, the student must receive a performance evaluation. Structured feedback is an important part of the overall learning experience.

Work-study and internship arrangements should be closely monitored to prevent an unsatisfactory outcome.

THE PARTICIPANTS

A well run work-study or internship program is truly a win-win situation for all participants. To achieve mutual benefits from the arrangement however, all parties must understand and carry out their individual responsibilities. The following information outlines the benefits and responsibilities for each player in a workstudy/ internship program.

The SHRM Chapter

An SHRM chapter (or chapters), whether student, professional, or students and professionals working together, can play a leading role in organizing or enhancing a WS/I program.

Benefits to the Chapter

Opportunities to help the community- establishing an internship program is providing a valuable service to both students and professionals.

Gain experience working with community leaders- organizing a WS/I program can help a chapter to build strong bonds with both the business and university community.

Raise the standard of professionalism of the future workforce- greater access to internship opportunities will create graduates who are better prepared to handle the challenges of an HR position. This will result in a higher level of professionalism which will reflect well on the entire profession.

Raise the experience level of beginning HR workers- graduates who have participated in relevant internships will become productive at a new job much quicker than fellow graduates with only classroom education.

Responsibilities

To begin work on a WS/I program, a chapter should do the following:

1. Appoint a committee or officer to assume primary responsibility for the project.
2. Identify a college dean or vice president responsible for approving the program.
3. Determine preliminary interest.
4. Appoint a permanent liaison to assist the university (after the university agrees to implement the program.)

5. Facilitate early program acceptance at the university by identifying employers who would be receptive to employing an intern.
6. Facilitate the matching of students seeking internships with companies sponsoring internships.
7. Invite interns to chapter meetings.
8. Bring interns together for roundtable discussions of projects or assignments.
9. Stimulate employer and student interest through chapter newsletter and activities.

Chapters should also be sure to involve their student chapter liaison, and their state and area college relations directors in the process. The expertise and experience of these individuals can be invaluable.

The University

Benefits to the University

Establishing closer ties with the business community- working with local companies to establish internships allows the college or university to build beneficial relationships with community leaders.

Enhancing offerings to students- a school with an active work-study program will be viewed favorably by students anxious to find jobs after graduation. Availability of WS/I programs could become a factor in the college selection process.

Enhancing school image- an institution organizing internship programs is responding proactively to businesses' call for better prepared graduates. The school will be viewed positively as being responsive to business and student needs.

Ensuring consistency of course offerings with real-world needs- the interaction with the business community provided through a WS/I program allows the university to better align its programs with the current demands of the job market.

Responsibilities

The university is responsible for defining the parameters of the program and its relationship to the curriculum. The school must determine whether credit will be given for participation, the length of the program, the fields of study that qualify for internships, and the academic requirements for students to qualify.

In many programs, students are required to write a paper or give an oral presentation summarizing their experience. Any such assignment would be organized by the university.

A faculty coordinator should be appointed to oversee the program. This individual will be the key person in the program's ultimate success. Some universities have a centralized program coordinated for all colleges, but more often each college coordinates the structure and administration of their own programs.

The faculty coordinator consults with the companies on objectives, agreements, and job requirements and acts as an advisor to the student interns to assist them in achieving the objectives of the internship.

Following are the responsibilities of the faculty coordinator:

- Identify potential employers.
- Define projects or job opportunities.
- Screen student internship candidates and develop a pool of qualified students.
- Conduct individual preplacement orientations and introduce the student intern to the nature and purpose of the internship.
- Introduce and orient the company supervisor to the purpose and objectives of the internship.
- Consult with the company supervisor and student intern on a regular basis regarding the student intern's performance.
- Coordinate activities between university and employer.
- Assume responsibility for the removal of a student intern from the internship setting whenever necessary.
- Assist employers in evaluating work of interns.

The Company

Benefits to the Company

Reduced recruiting costs- These programs offer access to a highly motivated and skilled labor pool.

Fresh perspectives- Students can offer new and objective viewpoints to stimulate creative problem-solving.

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Motivated workers- Student workers are enthusiastic and eager to learn.

Completion of special projects- Hiring student interns may allow the company to complete special projects which would otherwise go undone.

Increased access to minority candidates- Working with interns can assist employers in implementing affirmative action or diversity programs by providing broader access to qualified minority candidates.

Responsibilities

Employers interested in participating in a WS/I program should first acquire the complete details of the program from the university. The company must be sure that their needs are consistent with the university's program objectives.

Though students may sometimes be willing to trade work for the opportunity to gain experience, employers should consider applicable wage and hour laws when designing their internship programs. A work-study or internship program must be carefully structured and documented to ensure compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). To determine their obligations under FLSA, employers should consider the following questions before hiring an intern:

* **Who benefits?**

If the intern will do "productive work" from which the employer benefits, the individual is an "employee" and is entitled to minimum wage and possible overtime protection under FLSA. The internship should be set up primarily as a learning experience and not as a way to obtain free labor.

* **Has the intern been promised a regular position with the employer's organization?**

If the employer offers the promise of a regular job at the end of the internship, this makes the internship in essence a trial or probationary period. The intern is then being treated like an employee and should be compensated as such.

* **Does the intern perform duties typically performed by an employee?**

If the intern seems to be replacing a regular employee, it may be an indication that the intern is being treated like an employee.

* **Is the internship part of an established educational program for which the intern receives academic credit?**

A college or university granting credit for the internship adds legitimacy to the program as a formal, educational experience.

Some companies prefer to pay interns a stipend or to make a donation to the school or chapter to thank them for an intern's services. These may be viable alternatives in some cases, however the company must still comply with FLSA requirements.

If a company has determined that it is required to compensate the interns according to FLSA, then the stipend must be equivalent to an hourly rate of at least the minimum wage for all hours worked. A donation would not be appropriate in this situation because no remuneration would go to the student. If a company feels that no direct compensation of the student is required under FLSA, then a stipend or donation of any amount can be given.

An internship should offer a well-managed and worthwhile position which will provide growth opportunities for the student while fulfilling the work requirements of the employer. Work-study/ internship education must be learning-by-doing not learning-by-observation.

To meet this goal, the following actions should be taken:

1. **Establish clear job descriptions for internship positions.** These descriptions should include grade point average, experience, and level of education expected of the candidates.
2. **Screen the candidates and participate in establishing learning objectives for the students.** In most programs, the company is given the opportunity to interview internship candidates and to select the intern. The college is responsible for pre-screening the students, matching academic specialties with employer specifications, and setting up the interview schedule.
3. **Provide adequate supervision to support the interns in accomplishing their objectives.**
4. **Establish an appropriate work schedule.** Take into account available supervision, workload fluctuations, and student availability. Most universities will allow students involved in such programs to block out portions of their schedules for their WS/I commitment.
5. **Establish the level of pay and benefits if appropriate.** Some companies will offer benefits to the students including such extras as paid lunches or employee discounts.
6. **Prepare staff members.** All employees who will be interacting with the intern should understand that the student is there for learning as well as working and they should be encouraged to share their knowledge and expertise freely.

If the work-study/internship program will be conducted in a unionized environment, the program should be

discussed with union representatives prior to selecting an intern. It should be emphasized to the representatives that the program is an educational training cycle leading to a professional position, much like union sponsored apprenticeship programs.

The Student

Benefits to the Student

Gain a realistic perspective of the working world- a frequent complaint of college recruiters is that students have unrealistic expectations of the workplace. WS/I programs give students the chance to form a realistic picture of the working world.

Obtain marketable work experience- students can gain experience in the type of position they will pursue after college. This real-world experience will make them very attractive to potential employers.

Make valuable business contacts- contacts made on-the-job can often assist students in finding permanent employment after graduation.

Earn money while still in school- If paid, internships provide not only experience, but also financial benefits to students.

Responsibilities

To gain these benefits, students participating in work-study or internship programs should be prepared to abide by the following guidelines:

1. Adhere to company work hours, policies, procedures, and rules governing professional staff behavior.
2. Adhere to company and professional ethics governing the handling of confidential information and the observation of confidentiality.
3. Assume personal and professional responsibility for his/her actions and activities.
4. Maintain professional relationships with company employees, clients, and customers, both internal and external.
5. Approach established company policies and procedures with an open mind, and an honest desire for improvement.

6. Work on applying knowledge acquired in the classroom to real- world business situations.
7. Develop a self-awareness of attitudes, values, and behavior patterns that influence the work environment.
8. Prepare for and utilize learning opportunities such as training, meetings, or conferences offered by the company.
9. Complete work assignments in a thorough, consistent, and punctual manner.
10. Provide the faculty coordinator with periodic progress reports.

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) is the leading voice of the human resource profession, representing the interests of more than 160,000 professional and student members from around the world. SHRM provides its membership with education and information services, conferences and seminars, government and media representation, and publications that equip human resource professionals to become leaders and decision makers within their organizations. The Society is a founding member and Secretariat of the World Federation of Personnel Management Associations (WFPMA) which links human resource associations in 55 nations.

The Society was founded in 1948 as the American Society for Personnel Administration (ASPA). In September of 1989, the name was officially changed to the Society for Human Resource Management.

For more information about professional or student membership in the Society for Human Resource Management, contact SHRM at 1-800-283-SHRM or online at www.shrm.org.

Society for Human Resource Management
1800 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 548-3440
www.shrm.org