

## BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM THAT DRAWS TOP TALENT

The Career Services staff at Northwood University, in conjunction with academic departments, are committed to ensuring internships provide supervised career-related work experiences, develop professional skills, and demonstrate the real-world of the particular industry. We define an internship as, “An extension of the classroom with an emphasis in on-the-job-training that leads to experiential learning and skill development.”

This guide provides practical information and resources from National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). Specifically, their “How to Build a Premier Internship Program,” written by Julie Cunningham.

The content includes:

- A Business Case For Internship Programs
- Goals and Characteristics of Successful Internship Programs
- Criteria for an Internship
- Laying the Ground Work
- Structuring the Program
- Evaluating Interns/Program Performance
- Documentation
- Legal Aspects to Consider
- How the Career Services Team Can Help



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Revised 7/2022

## A BUSINESS CASE FOR INTERNSHIPS

Internships support the organization in many ways, here are a few:

- Allows the organization to develop future leaders (aka succession plan).
- Increases the visibility of the organization's products and/or services on-campus.
- Provides a cost-effective way to recruit, evaluate, and hire potential employees.

## GOALS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

Not every intern will convert to a full-time employee, let's be clear about that. However, there are certain characteristics evident in successful internship programs.

According to *Building a Premier Internship Program*, the successful internship program:

- Has support from top management.
- Is well-organized.
- Displays continuity from year to year.
- Is managed and run by well-trained professionals.
- Undergoes continuous evaluation and improvement.

In addition,

- Offers meaningful work assignments.
- Pays fair and competitive wages.
- Provides social opportunities for the intern to connect to a "buddy" at the company.

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## CRITERIA FOR AN INTERNSHIP

Career Services adopts the NACE's criteria for an internship. We strive to ensure that our students intern in professional environments where they can apply academic knowledge while developing new skills. Therefore, we recommend your internship framework meet these guidelines:

- The experience must be an extension of the classroom: a learning experience that provides for applying the knowledge gained in the classroom. It must not be simply to advance the operations of the employer or be the work that a regular employee would routinely perform.
- The skills or knowledge learned must be transferable to other employment settings.
- The experience has a defined beginning and end, and a job description with desired qualifications.
- There are clearly defined learning objectives/goals related to the professional goals of the student's academic coursework.
- There is supervision by a professional with expertise and educational and/or professional background in the field of the experience.
- There is routine feedback by the experienced supervisor.
- There are resources, equipment, and facilities provided by the host employer that support learning objectives/goals.
- It is an enjoyable experience!

A structured internship program protects your organization from legal retaliation, meets our criteria for on-the-job training that leads to skill development and ultimately, provides an opportunity to evaluate and develop future talent.

For more on NACE and their guidelines, visit <http://www.naceweb.org/internships/index.aspx>

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## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Building a framework for your internship program is vital for consistency and success. The program champion is often the manager of the entire program and oversees all aspects—from developing and communicating the internship program’s mission to following up on the operational details such as making sure interns are given an orientation and assigned a direct report. Furthermore, the program champion ensures the graduating intern’s conversion to full-time runs smoothly.

An effective program structure will include:

- ✓ Headcount plan
- ✓ Program design
- ✓ Program Champion | Manager | Mentor selection
- ✓ Communication channels
- ✓ Sourcing candidates
- ✓ Intern evaluation and feedback

### Headcount Plan

- Who – how many types of student interns are needed by major, degree level, and skills?
- Where – in what locations will the interns work?
- When – when will the interns be needed (from start to finish)?

Structure the “when” component around your business needs and articulate the specifics in your communication materials. We saw during the Covid-19 pandemic that professionals and students adapted quickly to stay employable, and the result solidifies the understanding that experiential learning no longer needs to fit the traditional, full-time job over the summer month’s format. Project based internships and business productivity tools are game changers; remain flexible in your expectations and over communicate.

## Program Design

There is a lot of wiggle room in program design. At the core, however, an effective internship program must address the needs of both the interns *and* managers in the organization.

### Students want

- to use their current knowledge, skills, and abilities,
- an opportunity for personal and professional skill development,
- an enjoyable experience, and
- a pathway to transition from college to career employment.

### Managers want

- a system to evaluate new talent and determine if they are a “fit” for the company, and
- a high-rate of conversion to full-time employment.

Design your internship program with a reasonable amount of flexibility to ensure the greatest number of candidate availability. Don't overlook nontraditional students; the diversity and backgrounds they bring is a definite plus for the organization.

At Northwood, internships earning academic credit must complete a minimum of 150 hours. This is usually achieved working over the summer, 40 hours a week for 10 weeks, beginning mid-May through mid-August.

Non-academic credit based internships have a greater amount of flexibility in terms of hours, timeframe, and documentation required.

## Program Champion | Manager | Mentor Selection

Finding the right people to champion your company's internship program is important for its overall success.

Choose people

- who have the skills required to work with interns,
- who have a vested interest in developing people,
- who have adequate time to supervise and evaluate an intern,
- who have an ability to recognize potential in inexperienced employees,
- who have a respect for the role of college recruiting, and
- who is able to make hiring decisions.

Students expect a manager/mentor to

- help make the transition to the workplace as smooth as possible,
- explain processes and procedures,
- teach them about the organization and its products and services,
- explain and help them navigate the organization's culture,
- act as a positive role model,
- provide feedback on performance,
- take an active role in their professional skills development,
- invite them to meetings and provide an opportunity to summarize experience, and
- take them out to lunch.

In order for students to have a positive experience in an internship, it is essential that they have access to individuals who have the time and willingness to guide them, to answer questions and help them navigate the corporate culture.

## Communication Channels

You will want to develop messaging for both internal and external audiences. Internally, communicate the purpose for internships and the importance of the program's success. Communicate upwards, downwards, and across all business units of your organization. Externally, see the table below for a few suggestions on how best to connect.

Today's students are interested in knowing about your company, the role it plays in the community, its products and/or services and subsequent impact on the Earth. And of course, the responsibilities and projects of the internship, the timeframe and hours, whether it's paid or unpaid, if housing, relocation, and travel is provided, etc.

### **Typical Communication Channels to Connect With Students**

Career Services Staff at a University	Fall & Spring Employment and Internship Fairs	Information Sessions
Online Job Boards (Handshake, GoinGlobal, CareerShift)	LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.	Guest Lecturer at NU Events Classroom Visits

## Sourcing candidates from Northwood University

Finding the right candidates to hire is critical to your programs success. Evidence suggests today's generation is big on name recognition. The more your representatives interact with the university, faculty, and career staff, the better chance you have at drawing top talent into your program. Here are a few suggestions to help grow your company's presence at Northwood University:

- [Contact the Northwood University Career Services Team](#) first. We can facilitate on campus or virtual employer information sessions for you to share your company bio and future employment needs. Employer information sessions tend to be much smaller in attendance than a big employment fair, making the event more intimate.
- Have an employer profile on [Handshake](#) and post your internship or co-op positions so students can “see” the positions you seek to fill. Handshake is the #1 jobs board to connect with student talent.
- Solicit Faculty and Career Services staff for referrals. Students who participate in sports activities have developed strong teamwork, leadership, and adaptability skills.
- Attend Northwood University's Fall & Spring Employment Fairs.
- Schedule a classroom visit and on-site information session.
- Do not overlook nontraditional students; the diversity and backgrounds our adult learners bring to the table is a definite plus for the organization.
- Solicit internal employee referrals.

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## Recruiting Tools

When recruiting candidates, the staff in university career centers, and the “high-touch” technique offered at career fairs, tend to be the best recruiting tools.

- Find interns by targeting schools by academic major, experience at the school, and the quality of the programs offered. Recruiters make their best finds at career fairs and on-campus information sessions, and through faculty contacts.
- Pay the intern competitive wages. Paid internships tend to draw top talent and expose the organization to a larger pool of candidates. Additionally, a paid internship makes it easier to place expectations and require specific outcomes from interns.
- Extend a full-time offer within days of interns leaving the program.
- Keep in touch with the intern.

The 2021 NACE survey results show the average intern conversion rate currently at 66.4%, a big jump post-COVID-19.

Year	Conversion Rate (%)
2016	69.1
2017	51.3
2018	45.6
2019	56.1
2020	55.5
2021	66.4

The average conversion rate for interns climbed by nearly 20%—jumping from 55.5% reported a year ago to 66.4% currently, according to results of NACE’s 2021 *Internship & Co-op Survey Report*. (See Figure 1.)

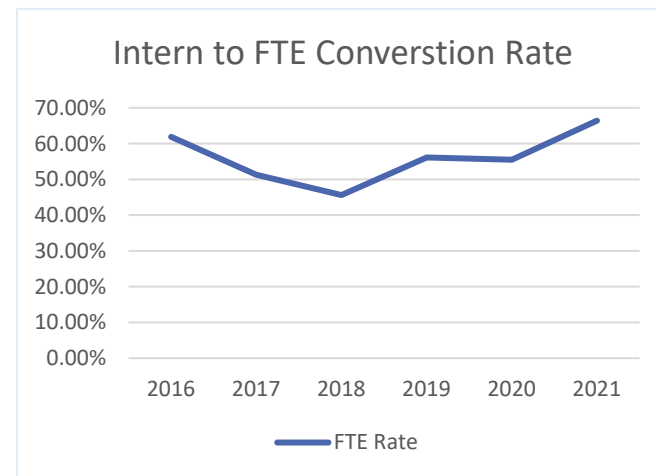


Figure 1 – Average Conversion Rate for Interns – Five Year Trend

## STRUCTURING THE PROGRAM

Your program infrastructure should include:

- Job descriptions
- Compensation and benefits plan
- Orientation agenda
- Handbooks and websites (if available)
- Activities for fun and professional development
- Evaluation
- Visibility

In addition to the first day orientation, consider holding fun professional development activities throughout the timeframe of the internship. For example, a plant tour or an opportunity to meet with senior executives (a photo with the executive makes a nice gift for the students.) Social activities are another way to help the intern develop connections with team members.

### Orientation

**An orientation is not an option.** Providing an orientation for the intern helps to set expectations on the first day. It also serves as a conduit for delivering information, completing HR paperwork, and helps the intern make connections in the organization. Hold the intern orientation the first day of work.

# DOCUMENTATION

## **Timeline** for headcount planning & recruitment activities

- How will you market the program to Northwood students?

## **Internship Plan**

- Standards of eligibility and application requirements
- Length of appointments
- Supervisor/Mentor (either by title or department)
- Guidelines for quality assignments
- Student performance appraisals

## **Mission Statement**

- Identify the activities you need to engage in to achieve mission

## **HR Documents**

- Job Description
- Compensation Structure
- Employment status (e.g.: temporary/nonexempt)
- Workplace requirements

## **Orientation Meeting Agenda**

## **Intern Handbook**

## **Skills and Competencies Check List**

## **Evaluation Form/s**



We can provide customizable templates for many of the documents noted at left, assisting you further with the construction of an internship program framework.

## EVALUATING INTERNS AND PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

Evaluating an intern's performance and providing feedback ensures continuous improvement of the program's success.

### Tips for an Effective Intern Performance Review

- Understand how the written evaluations of an intern's performance will be used by university officials. Have a discussion with the Internship Coordinator at Northwood University to gain a clear understanding.
- Have an in-depth conversation with the intern about the evaluation process and clarify their role in supplying the necessary documents to the university. This type of in-depth conversation improves the likelihood that interns leave with a realistic understanding of his/her performance. For the employer, the discussion could reveal students' perceptions of the experience, thus leading to program improvements.
- Collaborate to identify and resolve obstacles. One of the greatest challenges facing program champions/managers/mentors is the limited amount of time available to teach and mentor. Consider setting aside time every other week to meet for lunch and discuss how the intern is progressing while identifying any obstacles that need attention.
- Work with the university to develop approaches to effectively communicate constructive criticism to interns on problem areas. For example, evaluations that need to bring up issues related to personal appearance, dress, work ethic, and professionalism are uncomfortable yet essential for the student's sake.
- Continue to review existing feedback guidelines and evaluation criteria/forms for effectiveness and reliability.

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## LEGAL ASPECTS TO CONSIDER

### **Paid/Unpaid Internships – Safeguarding Against Legal Disputes**

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the leading source of information and guidance on the employment of the college educated, the decision whether or not to compensate interns is a big issue today considering a recent heightened scrutiny of internships and employers. In May 2010, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) issued a six-part test to determine if an employer is required to provide payment for an internship.

#### **If the following criteria are met, an employer is not legally required to pay an intern:**

1. The internship, even though it includes actual operation of the facilities of the employer, is similar to training that would be given in the educational environment;
2. The internship experience is for the benefit of the intern;
3. The intern does not displace regular employees;
4. The employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern, and on occasion its operations may be impeded;
5. The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship; and
6. The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages.

If the above criteria are met/followed, it is the opinion of NACE *and thus*, Northwood University, that the educational experience can be considered a legitimate internship.

## HOW WE CAN HELP

Partnering with the Career Services team will help you and your team:

- Join [Handshake](#) to create an employer profile and post open positions
- Participate in an employment event on campus or virtual
- Connect with program Chairs and Lead Faculty for guest speaker opportunities
- Increase your visibility on campus through information sessions and other university events
- Pass along customizable documents and resources for developing the program framework
- Match to possible intern candidates most likely to fit your needs.

In addition, we highly recommend that employers become a NACE member! Not only does this membership connect you to a network of career professionals, but it provides access to resources such as “Building a Premier Internship Program, a Practical Guide for Employers,” in its entirety.



Visit their website: <http://www.naceweb.org/membership/index.aspx>

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