

The Importance of Internships for College Students

How to Maximize Benefits of Internships and Part-Time Work

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Introduction

1. I was only able to get an undergraduate education in Civil Engineering by attending 9 years of night school because of financial issues and a low High School GPA. During that time, I worked full-time at several jobs that supported engineers, including: working in a print shop; acting as a structural and mechanical drafts person; creating cost estimates for construction projects; performing geotechnical field and laboratory work; and producing designs for structural and geotechnical projects. These experiences have been invaluable throughout my career. In every engineering and management position I held thereafter, I stood out because I knew how the total system worked, while my engineering peers did not understand most of the support requirements.
2. While in graduate school, I continuously worked part-time as a geotechnical and hydrologic designer at my Mentor's consulting firm. After graduation, I immediately became a "Senior" Project Manager, working on a variety of complex projects. My PhD peers, who had never had internships or part-time work, started as "beginners," and could never even think about competing with me from either the engineering or business aspects of the work.
3. As I progressed in my career, helping build my Mentor's company, starting and growing my own business, and becoming the CEO of a large, nationwide consulting and engineering firm, I interviewed many BS, MS and PhD engineers and scientists and support staff. Experience and attitude were always the primary considerations as to whether they were hired or not. The college(s) they had attended was never a primary factor in our decision making.

4. The reason for this personal history discussion is to illustrate my understanding of the importance of experience (internships, part-time or full-time work). From a life-time of experience, I agree completely with the following recent quotes:
 - Employers place more weight on experience, particularly internships and employment during school vs. academic credentials including GPA and college major when evaluating a recent graduate for employment. - Chronicle of Higher Education and American Public Media's Marketplace.
 - If you have a relevant internship displayed on your resume, it will give you a competitive advantage over all the candidates applying for the same position...Employers value internship experience because they provide students with the skills and experience that they cannot acquire in a school setting. – hcareerup
 - The goal is not to be successful, the goal is to be valuable. Once you're valuable, instead of chasing success, it will attract itself to you. – bossbabe

5. In conclusion, most often, having an internship is the only way to get hired immediately. Frequently, it will be with an organization you interned with.
 - You have a 7 in 10 chance of being hired by the company you interned with – Stuart Lander, Chief Marketing Officer at Internships.com

6. The remainder of this eBook is provided in the following Sections:
 - 1.0: What to Look for in an Internship or Part-Time Opportunity
 - 2.0: How to Find Good Internships
 - 3.0: Getting the Most Out of an Internship or Part-Time Work
 - 4.0: Preparing Resumes and Participating in Interviews

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1.0: What to Look for in an Internship or Part-Time Opportunity

1. Having an internship is always better than not having one. Therefore, if you cannot find an optimal internship, always take the next best opportunity. It is most important that you have some major related internships and/or relevant part-time work experience on your resume.
2. The ideal internship satisfies several objectives:
 - Having an internship with a respected organization significantly improves your resume and allows you to discuss your skills and experience in interviews.
 - Develop relationships that can lead to a good job, on the day you graduate.
 - Gets you the type of experience that can be a strong foundation for a successful career. This can include:
 - Being exposed to a successful operation.
 - Working with a seasoned Mentor who is willing to give you constructive comments about your assigned work.
3. It is usually best to intern in an organization with just one or two interns as opposed to a company with 10. In the latter case, you run the risk of being just a “number,” with limited exposure to only “entry level assignments,” and no meaningful exposure to potential Mentors.

4. An ideal internship opportunity will have the following characteristics:
 - A relatively small organization (e.g., less than 200) or a small, but important group in a larger organization. This type of situation will allow you to be:
 - Exposed to details of how the operation functions.
 - Directly involved with decision makers.
 - Able to identify and work with a seasoned Mentor.
 - An organization in a high growth mode, so that managers have maximum appreciation for anyone helping to produce quality results in a timely manner.
 - An institution with a compatible work culture that supports your growing and learning in the workplace and cares about you as an employee, even if you are only there temporarily.
 - Principals who are highly respected Professionals in your career area.
 - An organization with the reputation of hiring interns directly out of college.
 - A firm that has a reputation of hiring part-time workers.

5. If such an ideal organization does not exist, try to locate one with as many of the career building characteristics as possible.

2.0: How to Find Good Internships

1. This section provides several suggestions for how you may obtain good internships in your Top Career area. The initial methods focus on word-of-mouth and networking techniques, while the use of job search websites is discussed last. However, those job search websites can provide you with a wealth of information about specific organizations that are active in hiring

interns in your career area, and the types of tasks they are looking for. Even while in high school, it is suggested that you:

- Sign yourself up on job search websites and indicate that you are interested in career-related internships in your geographic area of interest. In this way the search engine will email you each time such an opportunity is posted, and/or
- Visit the job search websites periodically and list your career-related internship of interest and preferred geographic area. You will then be able to scan the number of related internships that have been posted on the site.

Any time you see a position or organization that seems particularly interesting, Google that organization and browse its web page. Over time, you can learn a lot of information about the services they provide, the types of projects they perform, and the clients they serve. This valuable information will help you focus on your areas of greatest interest and will also allow you to speak very intelligently on the company when being interviewed or when participating in team functions when you do get internships.

2. Periodically, you may want to do a similar search for full-time positions in your career of interest. This search will generally show you many more opportunities and with a wider group of organizations. Again, this process will provide you with valuable, general information related to that career, and may introduce you to organizations that you would be interested in when you graduate.
3. Often, the best way to secure a good internship is by word-of-mouth from a parent, their friends, or a professor (your “sponsor”) so long as:
 - The opportunity generally satisfies the “ideal” criteria discussed in Section 2.0.

- The opportunity is not just a courtesy arrangement, with no serious need for an intern.

This type of arrangement usually eliminates the back-and-forth resume/interview process and compels the organization to help you get the most out of the process. It also provides more of an opportunity for your sponsor to get feedback on how well you're doing and if part-time work or a future internship could be available to you.

4. A second way to obtain an internship is through internship programs sponsored by your college. These are becoming more and more popular as schools increasingly realize the importance of the internship conversion rate when getting good offers at the time of graduation.
5. Another good way to find desirable internships is by networking with people in your career field. Examples of ways by which a student can begin networking are:
 - Joining a Local or Regional branch of the National Society for the Career area you have determined to be best for you.
 - Through Job-fairs organized by your school district or a Google search of job fairs in your area.
6. For the Regional branch of a National Society alternative, there are at least 3 ways to begin networking. The first is to try to get a face-to-face meeting with management staff at the regional and/or local level. Usually, those individuals know key representatives of most career-related organizations in the area. If you can develop a relationship with one or two reps, they may hear or know of organizations looking for special interns. Also, National and Regional branches often have Trade Shows with Exhibit halls, that have booths for many of the more progressive organizations in

that career area. Generally, such shows have very low-cost admissions for students to attend. By observing the booths and talking to representatives, you can get a good feel for the types of organizations in that career area and you can learn about how they utilize and select interns.

7. Job Fairs are sponsored by colleges and have companies from a variety of career areas represented in their booths. By finding organizations in your career area, you can get a good understanding of the types of activities they do. And occasionally, you may be introduced to organizations particularly interested in finding students interested in internships. Additionally, a quick Google search of job fairs gives you a plethora of options to choose from in order to find a job fair in your area.
8. Finally, there are a number of web-based job search engines that advertise for internship opportunities posted by interested organizations. Examples include:
 - Indeed.com, which is often most comprehensive.
 - LinkedIn
 - Glassdoor
 - Internships.com
 - Internmatch.com
 - Internqueen.com
 - Idealist (for non-profits)
 - Absolute Internship (International)

You can find the types of internships available through the web page for each of these sources. When you see one of potential interest, you should “Google” that organization to see how they might fit your criteria. Several of these sources will email you each time an internship in your career area is posted.

3.0: Getting the Most Out of an Internship or Part-Time Work

1. The types of objectives you should have as an intern or part-time worker include:
 - Gain exposure to as many aspects of the work as possible.
 - Get as many meaningful assignments as possible.
 - Gain the reputation of being especially talented at completing assignments, having a positive attitude, and being a good team player.
 - Become a favorite of an important Mentor.
 - Get an offer for part-time work (for the intern) and full-time work at graduation.
2. You will not achieve any of these objectives if you produce average results. In that case, the assignments you receive will be routine and of lesser importance. Your supervisors will treat you as a beginner with no special attributes. On the other hand, in order to give yourself the best opportunity to achieve the most important objectives, you should aim to satisfy the following two rules, for every small or important assignment
 - 1) Always:
 - Do More Than You Are Asked to Do
 - Complete it Faster than Requested
 - Do it Better than Expected
 - Do the Necessary Work with Obvious Enthusiasm
 - 2) If, at any time, the first 3 criteria (especially the work assignment schedule) cannot be met, explain the reasons why as far as possible before the expected date.

3. By satisfying the first rule, your supervisors will consciously or subconsciously begin to give you more challenging and important assignments. In effect, you will be accomplishing some part of their work, leaving them to do more and be better than is expected by their supervisor or customer.
4. Sometimes satisfying the rules will require you to research or complete portions of the assignment topic on evenings or weekends. Since you are doing work that you are good at and passionate about, this extra effort should not be burdensome. And, the short- and long-term benefits will positively impact your future in college and during your entire career.
5. Again, by always following the rules, you will often be offered valuable part-time work, additional internship or full-time employment at the time of graduation. You will be sure to get strong, positive letters of recommendation if you pursue an internship or full-time work with different organizations. Finally, your starting pay in a full-time position usually will be significantly higher than that of a “beginning” graduate in the workforce.

4.0 Preparing Resumes and Participating in Interviews

There are many factors that go into writing a professional looking resume. A quick and easy Google search will garner you some effective examples. Some tips for writing a good resume include:

- Instead of writing an “Objective,” write a summary of why you are looking to become an intern with the company. Describe your goals, why you want the job and how you can be the answer to their needs.
- Look for key words in the Internship job description and if you have any past experience doing any of those things, make sure you include them and highlight them in your job experience.
- Use action words, such as “performed,” “managed,” “completed,” “created,” and “produced.”
- List your accomplishments and quantify them (I saved time, money, etc.). If you need to think about this, ask yourself what the benefit was of you doing that particular task (or what would have happened if you hadn’t done it).
- Use a professional looking font. Something that is simple and easy to read. Keep your resume short and sweet.

1. There also are good references for suggesting how you perform in an interview. Examples are:

- Before you go to an interview, do your homework and research the company. Dropping bits of knowledge about the organization during your interview is extremely impressive. It shows you are already invested in the company.
- Study common interview questions and role play answering them with someone or look in the mirror and ask yourself the questions and respond back to yourself out loud. Practice repeatedly until you feel you are used to being able to respond to questions that you may not be prepared for, but can still answer quickly, intelligently and effectively.
- Be able to intelligently and eloquently describe and discuss why you want the position and why you think you are the best candidate for the job.

- Have some questions prepared to ask the interviewer at the end of your interview.
- Make a good impression – be positive, genuine and enthusiastic about the job. Act and speak as though you are ready and more than able to take on this challenge.

2. If the interview is going well, it is reasonable that you ask the following types of questions. Most interviewers would see this as a positive:

I am very interested in this opportunity to work with _____ this summer. I would like to ask you a few questions because I want to get as much good experience on the job that I can while contributing positively to your normal activities at work.

1. If, from the start, I perform tasks better than expected, will your staff allow me to become more deeply involved in additional tasks? I want to be a beneficial part of the organization and to learn as much as I can.
2. Is there anyone in the group who could function as my Mentor? I would like to get feedback on my work and be able to ask questions from time-to-time, without disrupting operations.
3. Will I be able to get feedback at the end of my internship, regarding how I did, with suggestions of how I might improve on future opportunities?
4. Can you tell me if there is any possibility for a part-time or full-time job at the end of my internship if you are happy with my work?