



For Employers: Best Practices & Tips for Virtual Internships

This document provides best practices & tips for employers that are considering hosting virtual internships. These guidelines are designed to help employers to set up successful virtual internships to benefit the organization as well as student interns.

Virtual internships can be an equally rewarding experience as an on-site internship for both employers and students. Working remotely allows for flexibility and safety for students and employers, especially during times of global change. Following some of the suggested tips and guidelines below will ensure a successful virtual internship experience:

- **Start Strong - Setting Up for Success!** Allocate more time prior to, as well as at the start of, the internship for the following:
 - Select and test and the right software for managing work
 - Staff training to use the new software/systems (if students are expected to use new software or information technology, it should be provided free-of-charge)
 - Develop a work plan for the intern, training materials, activities and tools that the intern will need to be successful in the role
 - Establish cultural and professional norms and expectations i.e., communications plan, supervisory meeting expectations, team culture, working with other members fo the team, etc.
 - 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

- **Create a Written Work Plan:** 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

- **Access to Information:** 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

- **Team Engagement:** 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)

- **Create Balance:** Create and deliver a well-balanced experience for your intern that includes the opportunity for the intern to:
 - Learn about your organization
 - Focus on professional development
 - Engage in meaningful projects and work that will help to develop their overall ability to become a valuable team member in the future
- **Fair Compensation:** Our position at UMSI is that internships should be paid. The reason for this position is threefold: (1) unpaid internships are often only accessible and feasible for privileged and wealthy students, which can reproduce social inequalities since internships are known to have positive impacts on grades and employment prospects, (2) if the work is truly meaningful for the organization then it is likely to be worth compensating the student intern for their work, and (3) exploitation of student interns (particularly in the private sector) has been documented around the world, where unpaid students perform important duties for an organization. Paying student interns avoids this program.
 - Average pay rate for UMSI students ranges from \$15-\$25+/hr depending on type of internship, level of work, type of organization, and skills required

If your internship budget or funding has been impacted due to COVID-19, please know that UMSI students are eligible for internship funding support from the school that could help supplement an unpaid or low-paying internship. Students can apply and request funding as deemed necessary. It is expected that compensation is discussed at the start of the recruiting process for transparency and planning for the student.

Technology Resources for Delivering a Virtual Internship:

- Face to Face Communication: GoToMeeting, Zoom, FaceTime, WebEx, Zoho Meetings, etc.
- Other communication tools: Slack, Email, Instant Messenger, etc.
- Free Project Management Tools: Asana, OpenProject, nTask, Monday, etc.
- Online file sharing – Google Suite, DropBox, Box, etc

Source: The Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions, UW-Madison
http://ccwt.wceruw.org/documents/CCWT_report_COVID-19%20Internships.pdf