

Internships

Finding opportunities, what to look for, and tips for making the most of your experience

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Benefits of Interning

You will gain firsthand knowledge about a career field

“I walked into the job knowing almost nothing about the TV business—just that I wanted to be in it. I walked out knowing script formats, lighting techniques, how filming is done, the value of editors, and even the role of office politics.” Smith intern, Cold Squad IV Productions, Inc., Vancouver

You will develop skills employers seek

According to surveys by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the top five skills most sought in college grads are leadership, ability to work in teams, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and strong work ethic. An internship is a great opportunity to cultivate these traits.

You will expand your view of the world

“My internship could not have been more eye-opening or incredible. Operation Crossroads really wants volunteers to experience what it is like to live in a rural African village and confront cultural, social, and economic differences.” Smith intern, Operation Crossroads Africa, Ghana

You can gain contacts and recommendations

“Should Sarah ever wish my help in obtaining a full-time job in publishing, I would be more than happy to assist her in any way possible.” Editorial Director, W.W. Norton & Company, NYC

You might receive job offers

“I would happily welcome her back as a full-time member of our staff.” Membership Coordinator, Conservation Law Foundation, Boston

Before Your Internship Search

Reflect

What fields and issues interest you? What skills would you like to use or develop? Where would you like to live? Where have you dreamed about working?

Research housing options in your target location

Can you stay with family or friends? Have you explored college or temporary housing? Check the resources our [Housing Listings](#).

Consider your finances

You might intern part-time and also find a part-time paid job.

Ensure your online presence is professional

Review your social media profiles, online photos, etc. Google your name and see what you find. Employers do this, and may make hiring decisions based on what they see.

Resources for Your Search

Lazarus Center for Career Development’s [Internship Resources](#) page

Collection of links to selected internship resources, programs, and databases based on location or career field. These lists are extensive, yet are just a fraction of the information available.

Resources for Your Search (continued)

[Handshake](#) lists internships received by the Center. Search by keyword, industry, function, and location.

The Lazarus Center's resource library has internship directories and Summer Activity Reports written by Smith Praxis interns over past summers. Each report notes where the student worked, what the experience was like, and the contact person. Use these reports for leads and ideas even if you're not using Praxis funding.

Search online. Find out what organizations are making news and why. Check the websites of those that interest you, and follow them on Facebook, LinkedIn, or other social media. Use the Vault *Career Insider* (enter through Handshake) to research industry trends and target interesting organizations to contact.

Professional association websites often post internships (ex: American Society of Magazine Editors). Search for associations online or ask professionals in your field of interest.

Network with Smith alumnae and others in your field. Ask them about their career paths and get their advice on your internship search. Join Smith College LinkedIn groups and others in your field of interest and also use the [Office of Alumnae Relations](#) online directory to find email addresses for many alumnae. Consult the networking section of our website and our [Informational Interviewing](#) guide for protocol.

Friends, former supervisors, and faculty, may be helpful in your search. Ask for their ideas.

Applying for Internships

Start early. Some internship programs have early application deadlines—even in the fall. A suggested timetable to adapt to your needs is on page 6.

Apply to interesting positions even if your qualifications don't exactly match an internship's requirements. Many skills can be learned "on the job." Emphasize what you offer, not what you lack.

Most internship applications require a resume and cover letter. Others may use an online application system or require an essay, transcripts, and references. For help with your resume and cover letters, consult our [Resumes and Cover Letters](#) guide and bring your drafts to drop-in hours.

Organizations often require an **interview** (in-person, by phone, or by Skype). Consult our [Interviews](#) handout and arrange a practice interview with a career advisor.

Send your application or inquiry to the person for whom you'd want to work. If you can't get a name by phoning or emailing, use "Dear Director," "Dear Internship Coordinator," "Dear Research Director," etc.

Found a great organization you'd like to work for, but no internships are listed? It's okay to ask about interning! A sample **internship proposal letter** is on page 7.

If phoning, practice what you're going to say. Introduce yourself and summarize your interest in interning with the organization. Mention the Praxis program, if applicable.

Evaluating an Internship Offer

You won't know for sure the pros and cons of an internship until you're on the job.

Asking some of the following questions during an interview to help you learn about the position:

- What are some of the projects or assignments I would be involved in, and what would my role be?
- How are interns supervised? Do interns meet with supervisors regularly? How do interns get feedback on their work?
- How would you describe the work culture?
- What are the most important qualities you look for in an intern?
- Are interns included in staff meetings, seminars, or training sessions?

How do you see the breakdown between time spent on clerical work and career-related projects? All employees do their share of routine work. Show that you're eager to pitch in but be sure you'll have career-related work as well.

Reflect on the responses. Do they make you enthusiastic? Uncertain? If you're offered the internship and aren't sure whether you want to accept it, speak with your potential supervisor for further details. You're also welcome to discuss your choices with a career advisor.

Succeeding at Your Internship

Confirm ahead of time your starting date and work hours with your supervisor

Get directions, and if you have a car, find out where to park. Ask about the dress code, and if you'll need an ID for security.

Observe your new environment

How do people address each other? What are the interactions between co-workers, supervisors, and employees? What's your supervisor's management style? The more you observe and understand, the more you'll learn what is expected and how to conduct yourself to feel comfortable and be productive.

Clarify details

Speak to your supervisor in the first day or so to confirm your hours, lunch break, and length of your internship. If you haven't already, discuss any prior commitments for which you'll need time off.

Clarify expectations

Find out what projects you will work on and what results are expected. Discuss what you hope to learn, and ask if your goals are realistic. Ask how interns are evaluated, as regular, substantive feedback is essential to your learning process. Routine tasks (copying, faxing, getting coffee) are often part of an intern's duties. Give your best effort to everything you're asked to do, and you'll be more likely to secure a strong reference and be given more responsibility.

Create a Learning Contract

A written learning contract will help clarify what is expected and give you the chance to tell your supervisor what you hope to learn. See sample learning contract on page 8 of this guide.

Pitch in where needed and perform all assignments with care. You can learn a lot by being part of the environment, even if you're not working on a major project. Work efficiently and you'll have more time to volunteer for new projects.

Succeeding at Your Internship (continued)

Be professional. Arrive on time. Don't conduct personal business at your internship. This includes phone conversations, emailing, texting, or making after-work plans. You may observe permanent staff doing so, but it's not wise behavior for interns. When meeting people, maintain eye contact and make sure your handshake is firm. If you're sitting, stand up. Good manners matter!

Communication, planning, and consideration are critical to maintaining good working relationships. Show that you're trying to minimize any inconvenience to the organization.

Strive to meet people at all levels of your organization and learn about their experience. They may offer advice and ideas informally, or you may arrange more formal informational interviews. Ask for the business cards of those you meet and follow any advice or leads they offer. Write a thank you note after an informational meeting and stay in touch, perhaps by sending a link to an interesting article, news of an upcoming conference, and the like.

At the End of Your Internship

Complete your responsibilities and projects. Leave your workspace in order.

Ask your supervisor or someone who knows your work well for a letter of reference. Make this request while still on-site and your performance is fresh in mind.

If you're a junior interested in working for the organization after graduation, bring up the subject of employment before you leave. Assert your interest and qualifications and inquire about the next step to be considered for a full-time job.

After you leave, send a thank you letter to your supervisor and to other employees who served as mentors. Convey your appreciation for the experience and for references written on your behalf. Stay in contact with the people you met. An occasional email, phone call, or visit during school breaks will enable you to nurture relationships with these members of your professional network.

Reflect on What You Learned About...

- **Yourself.** Did this experience make you aware of talents you didn't know you had? Did you like what you saw of the field? Any particular part of it? None of it? Why?
- **Your preferred relationship to colleagues and clients.** Do you like to go to colleagues or have them come to you? Would you rather be on a team or working independently? Would you prefer to seek out clients or have them come to you?
- **Your preferred work environment and pace.** Did you feel stressed? Bored? Are you comfortable with frequent deadlines, or would you prefer a setting that allows for project work over time?
- **Your preferred balance of tasks.** Was it more fun to have a mix of tasks every day? Did you look forward to the days you were working on the same task?
- **Your preferred way of being supervised.** Do you prefer close supervision or more independence? Do you like formal meetings with your supervisor or flexible, as-needed check-ins?

Consider talking through these ideas with a career advisor, faculty advisor, or other individuals, as that conversation may lead to additional insights about your experience and potential next steps.

Internship Search Timeline

Internship application due dates and hiring process timelines vary widely. Highly competitive summer internships and fellowships may hire interns 5-7 months in advance of the internship, while other organizations may post summer internships February or March.

Here is a sample plan for your internship search efforts:

September – October

- Start thinking about your goals for next summer. Do you want to test out a career interest? Earn a certain amount of money? Live in a particular location? Build your network?
- Identify the skills you offer a potential employer and issues or organizations of interest to you.
- Become familiar with our resources: our website, Handshake and Lazarus Center library resources such as Smith students' Summer Activity Reports of their Praxis-funded internships.
- Prepare your resume.

November – December

- Some internships, fellowships, and summer job programs have deadlines during this period. Examples: some journalism/media internships, summer science fellowships, finance programs. The majority of positions have later deadlines.
- Networking is an important part of any search. Ask Smith faculty to suggest people and organizations. Used LinkedIn or the Office of Alumnae Relations' online directory to identify Smith alumnae to contact. Re-connect with past supervisors. Develop new contacts at organizations that interest you. Try to arrange informational interviews over a school break or during J-term. Connections developed over J-term may position you for the summer.

January Interterm

- Many students return to their previous summer jobs to earn money. In addition, you can...
- Try to create an internship. It can be one week to the entire month in length.
- Shadow someone for a day to get a feel for their work and work environment.
- Arrange informational interviews with alums and others. Maintain contact over the semester.

February – March

- Many established internship programs have deadlines now. Review your resume, cover letters, and (for some fields) application essays with a career advisor at the Lazarus Center.
- The number of summer job and internship postings tend increase now, as employers firm up their needs. Review our newsletters and Handshake regularly.
- Spring Break can be a great time to make networking connections and contact potential employers.
- Apply for several positions, not just one or two. Use a variety of resources and techniques. Follow up!

April – May

- Applying for [Praxis](#) funding? The application deadline is typically the final day of spring semester classes.
- Many organizations now know their needs for the summer. If you've made prior contact, you'll be in a better position to land an opportunity. Keep at it and follow up on previous leads and contacts.
- As the semester ends, consider phoning organizations to propose an internship. Some students may even secure internships and summer jobs once they get to their target location.

Sample Internship Proposal/Inquiry Email

Subject: Smith College student seeking internship with Easter Seals

Dear Ms. Doe:

I am a sophomore English major at Smith College interested in interning with Easter Seals Disability Services this January. I am a strong writer and collaborator who is eager to contribute to your work and build my experience in a not-for-profit organization.

I learned about Easter Seals in Western Massachusetts last summer as a counselor at Camp Friendly's in Goshen where I worked with special needs campers. The impact the Easter Seals program had on the children—building both their physical confidence as well as their self-esteem—inspired me to explore ways I can contribute my skills and energy to the organization during the school year. In addition to supporting your work, my interests include learning how a national non-profit operates at the local level with regard to fundraising, volunteer recruitment, and other outreach initiatives.

The attached resume will give you additional information about my skills and experience. I would love to speak with you at your convenience about the possibility of a short-term volunteer internship with Easter Seals this January.

Sincerely,

Madison Quinn
(413) 585-2111

ATTACHMENT: Madison Quinn resume.pdf

Internship Learning Contract

Complete at the beginning of internship. We encourage interns and supervisors to revisit this learning contract regularly during an internship. Modify this form as appropriate for your organization and internship.

Organization/Company Name: _____

Internship Title: _____ Internship start date: _____

Student/Intern Name: _____

Internship Supervisor's Name: _____

1. Internship Description: Describe the intern's role. Identify primary responsibilities, expected work hours, and projects to be completed (including deliverables and deadlines, if appropriate).

2. Supervision and Evaluation: How will the intern be supervised? Include a summary of training / assistance / consultation to be provided. How will the intern's progress be evaluated, and how often?

3. Learning Objectives/Goals: What can the intern expect to learn or develop through this experience? This may include goals identified by the student. How will the internship experience expand upon and/or inform the student's academic work?

Intern's signature: _____ Date: _____

Supervisor's signature: _____ Date: _____