



Finding a Quality Internship

Elements to look for and avoid

Nowadays, there are many websites where internships and jobs are posted. When looking at opportunities, you may wonder, “How do I know if this will be a good learning experience? Will it be worth my time? What skills will I gain? What will I be doing every day in this role? Will I have any special projects? Will I be able to achieve my learning goals?” The Career Education Center wants you to have a *quality* internship experience! This handout outlines what to look for when evaluating an internship opportunity, and what to avoid.

In addition to applying to positions posted online, many UP students have had success creating an internship with an existing contact or via direct outreach to an organization. Factor this process into your [Internship Search Action Plan](#).

Questions to consider:

Students are busy and want co-curricular activities to be worthwhile and meaningful. When thinking about internship opportunities and developing a search plan, consider the following questions:

What do I want to learn? What skills do I want to develop? What industries or job functions would I like to explore? What subject areas would I like to learn more about? What types of professionals would I like to shadow or have as a mentor? Would I want a remote internship? Where do I want to live? Do I have friends or family in other cities where I could stay if I want to broaden my geographical search? Could I complete an [international internship](#)? What can I afford (paid or unpaid internship)?

Answering these questions will help guide your search towards professional experiences that align with your skills, interests and values. While *you* are the one applying to and interviewing for opportunities, you want the internship to be beneficial to you and your goals as much as it benefits the employer.

What is a quality internship?

An internship is a form of experiential learning where students apply classroom theories to practical, real world settings under the guidance of an experienced supervisor. **By completing an internship, students gain professional skills, assess strengths, explore career interests and develop employer connections.** Typically, these are temporary experiences that range from 8-15 weeks in length.

Key elements of a quality internship:

- The experience has a **defined duration**, and a **position description** with desired qualifications (see below).
- There are **clearly defined learning objectives/duties** outlined by the employer prior to the intern beginning the internship.
- There is **supervision by a professional** with expertise and background in the field of the internship.
- There is **routine feedback** by the experienced supervisor.
- There are **resources**, equipment, and facilities provided by the host employer that support learning objectives/goals (e.g., computers, desk, training materials).
- The skills or knowledge learned must be **transferable** to other employment settings.

Many of these elements will be clearly indicated within the position description, but not always. Sometimes you will come across internship position descriptions that are short, vague, and do not provide many details about the role. If you are uncertain about whether to apply, reach out to the contact on the posting with specific questions to gain more information about the role to see if it aligns with your interests and goals.

Alternatively, you can apply and then if offered an interview, come prepared with questions about the specifics of the role. Doing your research and preparing questions demonstrates your initiative, your interest in the position, and that you are taking the process—and your learning—seriously.

Internship compensation

One of the University of Portland's criteria on Handshake is that internships within *for-profit* organizations meet minimum wage laws based on the state in which the opportunity takes place. Many non-profit organizations and government agencies offer unpaid internships, and those will be approved. If rate of pay is unclear in the posting, it is okay to reach out and ask for more details.

Internship position description

It is crucial for an intern to have a formalized position description. This should outline duties, responsibilities, compensation and a basic schedule so that both the intern and the employer have a mutual understanding and aligned expectations from the outset of the experience. This is especially important if you created an internship through a connection rather than having applied to a posted position online. Some of this may be included in an offer letter from the organization. The most important thing is to have all these elements in writing before you begin working.

What should be included in an internship position description?

The sections below offer a guiding framework for internship position descriptions.

- **Title for the internship**
- **Description of duties**
 - An outline of the main objectives, tasks and priorities of the internship
 - Action verbs usually describe the main responsibilities or tasks for the position
 - The organization's name, mission or values are referenced in this section
 - Outlining the learning components or competencies that the student will gain as an intern establishes that the position is primarily learning-based
- **Qualifications required or preferred**
 - Skills, knowledge, training or education that the intern should possess to be successful
 - Preference for specific year in school or coursework desired
 - Qualifications can be listed as preferred or desired, but not necessarily required
 - To comply with Equal Employment Opportunity laws, discriminating factors such as gender, age, ethnicity should never be included
- **Compensation information**
 - Hourly wage and/or stipend
 - Additional benefits that are "perks" of the internship (e.g., travel reimbursement, lunch vouchers, tickets to events, etc.)
- **Internship duration**
 - The minimum number of hours per week (if applicable) or total hours for the entire internship period is included
 - The start and end dates (even if only generally listed – e.g., spring semester)
 - Agreed-upon work schedule
- **Supervisor and team information**
 - Who will the intern report to?
 - Supervisor and mentor information

*If the internship is based remotely, there are additional ways to structure a quality virtual internship experience. View the [UP Virtual Internship Guidelines here](#).



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Importance of the internship supervisor

96% of UP students rated having an “extremely” or “satisfactory” internship in 2019. Of the remaining internships rated “average” or “unsatisfactory,” 100% of students indicated negative experiences with or regard toward their supervisor.

Internship success and satisfaction is closely linked to the quality of supervision and collegial environment of the organization. **You want to have a supervisor who is a clear communicator, involved and invested in your development, and focused on your training and growth as a professional.** When you interview with your potential supervisor, ask them about their style of supervision, how they provide feedback, and what types of regular check-ins you would have if offered the internship.

Throughout the application and interview process, if you encounter unprofessional or questionable communication or behavior by an employee of the organization, it might be best to discontinue the process with the organization. Those red flags likely indicate an organizational culture that you want to avoid.

Signs a Job or Internship Posting May Be Fraudulent

Whether you are applying to positions on LinkedIn, Indeed or even on Handshake—it is important to be savvy and protective of your data and personal information. Below are three clear signs that a position may be fraudulent, and directions on how to proceed if you do come across a situation that you believe to be a scam.

1. You are asked to cash checks or make money transfers.

Do not agree to have funds or paychecks direct deposited into any of your accounts before meeting the employer. You should never transfer, send or wire money on behalf of the employer.

2. You are asked to provide financial information or your Social Security Number.

Never provide personal financial information, your Social Security Number, or a photo copy of your ID prior to hiring. It is also uncommon to be asked to provide upfront fees to an employer.

3. The posting has multiple grammatical and/or spelling errors

The job or internship posting should provide details including specific responsibilities, required qualifications, and compensation information. The posting should be clearly written and primarily free of errors.

Proceed with caution if you encounter that...

- Emails come solely from a Google, Yahoo, AOL, Hotmail, or Outlook.com accounts
 - Correspondence should primarily come from a valid company email address. Occasionally, you might see that startup or very small nonprofits will have a non-corporate email address. In those instances, check the organization’s website to make sure that the email addresses match the posting.
- A specific location for the job is never listed
 - Look at the organization’s website. Does the phone number and address provided match either the corporate headquarters or one of their locations listed on the website?
 - If the position is indicated as remote, make sure the organization has contact information and a locatable address as mentioned above.

What to do if you have found a suspicious job or internship posting:

- Reach out to the Career Center if you have any questions or want a second opinion about an opportunity
- Verify the Authenticity of an organization by checking them out on one of the following:
 - Better Business Bureau
 - Glassdoor
 - Google

If you believe you are currently in an employment scam, contact the Federal Trade Commission at 1-877-382-4357, or at www.ftc.gov.

Within the Handshake system, the University of Portland Career Education Center reviews each employer account before they are able to post jobs and internships to the University. We encourage you use your best judgement and contact us if you have any questions or concerns about the legitimacy of a posted position or employer.

If you have questions, please contact:

Internship & Engagement Coordinator

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