



Intern development & meeting topics

Six stages of intern development

The following information regarding the stages of development for an intern is adapted from *The Internship as Partnership: A Handbook for Campus-Based Coordinators and Advisors*, edited and published by the National Society for Experiential Education, 1995. The stages are generally based on Inkster and Ross's Internship Stage Model.

Stage One: Arranging and Anticipating an Internship

When the student first secures the internship, he/she experiences "intern excitement," high motivation, and idealistic expectations. There may also be some self-doubt, "Can I really do this? Am I qualified? How do I fit into the work environment?" By completing and negotiating a Learning Agreement, the intern will develop self-confidence and more realistic expectations about how his/her professional goals can be accomplished through the job duties during the internship. A faculty advisor can assist in empowering the student to take an active role in problem solving and developing or refining the internship goals.

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Usually the student will reach out to a faculty member to help secure the internship in addition to or instead of meeting with Career Services. Listed below are ways that you can assist in easing the student through the arranging and anticipating stage of an internship.

1. Discuss a student's strengths, weaknesses and range of interest for professional experiences.
2. Help a student gain confidence that he/she can complete an internship for credit, or not for credit, by outlining examples of areas of strengths.
3. Give students a sense of when they should look to complete an internship during the course of their academic experience, given course loads and specific class experience that prepares the student for a certain internship.
4. Help students craft their professional goals that relate to the job duties of the internship.
5. Encourage the student to meet with Career Services for assistance in developing professional goals, particularly for an internship for academic credit.

Stage Two: Orientation and Establishing Identity

When the intern arrives on site, he/she is preoccupied with new learning, information and finding an identity in the workplace. Interns may feel overwhelmed by too much information or underwhelmed by simple and routine tasks. Help the intern realize that this is a typical adjustment period that all new professionals experience. Encourage strategies that will establish the intern's competence such as requesting regular meetings with his/her supervisor, tactics for meeting people, and approaching his/her workload. The internship supervisor may also need to consider developing some training opportunities for the intern.

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The orientation process is often a time of discord or stress for interns as they are adjusting to a new environment and absorbing a lot of information. In addition, the employer may not yet be fully confident in the intern's abilities. This time period usually coincides with the first few meetings between a faculty member and intern.

Topics for meeting discussion may include:

1. Discuss if the intern and supervisor have set regular check-in meetings and have reviewed the internship learning agreement. If they have not yet done so, recommend the importance of setting regularly scheduled meetings to ease through the transition.
2. What is the organizational culture at the internship site like?
 - How are decisions made typically?
 - How are decisions communicated to employees?
 - How are employees recognized for exceptional or below average work?
 - How do departments interact with one another?
 - How do managers communicate with employees?
 - What are five key words or phrases that best describe your internship organization?
 - What are five key words or phrases that best describe your experience so far?
 - What are the orientation/onboarding processes that you have experienced so far?
3. What is the staffing and organizational design at the internship site? Where does the intern fit on the organizational totem pole? Can the intern draw the organizational chart of the company?
4. What types of activities is the intern looking forward to after the orientation period? What types of knowledge about the organization will be helpful in completing these activities?
5. What type of coping strategies is the intern using during this orientation/training period? How is he/she dealing with processing enormous amount of information?

Stage Three: Reconciling Expectations with Reality

Once the intern establishes a work routine, he/she often finds the situation different from what was initially expected. Differences between work and school become clear: there isn't the same flexibility of scheduling, the work may not be very exciting or challenging, there are no chances of incompletes, and there are serious consequences for being late or not completing the work tasks. Help the intern re-evaluate expectations, identify new and realistic goals, and reflect on skills and strategies already learned. You may need to encourage the intern to become more assertive about his/her needs and to negotiate responsibilities or priorities with the supervisor.

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This stage is a pivotal time in the intern's development, as the intern begins to have an understanding of how his/her work expectations may be different from when he/she first began the internship. In addition, the intern is recognizing the many differences that exist between academic and professional life and may have emotional reactions to these differences.



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Topics for meeting discussion may include:

1. How have your expectations changed from the time that you began the internship to now?
2. What responsibilities/duties are you struggling with? What responsibilities/duties are you excelling at?
3. How is communication between you and your supervisor? How do each of you prefer to communicate with each other (e.g., face to face, via email, text, g-chat, phone, etc.)? How regularly does communication occur (weekly meetings, random check in, via email daily, etc.)?
4. Have you begun collaborating with any of your co-workers? Are there any sorts of personality or communication complications in working with others, either individually or in a team setting?
5. Is there any duty, goal or project that you are not progressing well on? How can I help you to organize your time so that you feel confident in completing this project or task?

Stage Four: Productivity and Independence

As Stage Three is successfully negotiated, the intern moves to this stage, which is characterized by increased learning and productivity on site. Interns become more confident and self-aware, focus energy on accomplishments, and feel integrated into the work group. This is a good point to assess/evaluate and have the student and employer complete a mid-point evaluation. Interns can demonstrate their competence and receive specific feedback on performance through evaluation at this time.

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It's important to take time during the mid-point of the internship to discuss the range of experiences that the intern has had up to this point. Oftentimes in this stage, the intern forgets what it was like at the beginning and fails to recognize how far he/she has come in his/her professional development. It may also be a good idea to connect the student with a peer that is also interning so that they can meet informally outside of class and discuss their mutual experiences.

Topics for meeting discussion may include:

1. Outline this new stage of productivity and independence. Reflect on a few particular accomplishments that the intern has completed.
2. Reflect on the strategies for working effectively that the intern has learned, created and/or implemented at his/her internship site.
3. Review the goals set out at the beginning of the internship and assessing which ones have been completed and which ones still need to be completed.
4. Prepare the intern for a feeling of "burn out" that inevitably occurs during the eighth or ninth week of the internship. At this point, students often feel a hardship of balancing internship work, school-work and personal responsibilities or interests. Discuss how the intern may be best able to manage his/her time through this period.

5. Any recent communication issues or concerns that have cropped up in the last couple of weeks and how the intern has successfully or unsuccessfully handled these obstacles.

Stage Five: Closure

Creating closure may be difficult for the intern and the site does not always facilitate it fluidly. Some interns leave with a sense that they "didn't matter," others leave feeling that they can't get the assignments completed, and others feel extremely fulfilled regarding the amount of work that he/she accomplished. This is where the value of setting learning goals prior and during the internship becomes most evident. Encourage the intern to seek career advice, a future reference and/or a letter of recommendation from the supervisor.

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This is one of the most satisfying stages in an intern's development as they have come to see the full application of his/her work during the internship. It is important to recognize the high level of satisfaction experienced by interns upon completion of the internship and create an environment of festivity/celebration around these accomplishments.

Topics for meeting discussion may include:

1. Revisit the original goals set out at the beginning of the internship and reflect upon the ways in which the student tackled accomplishing these goals.
2. The new skills, strengths and strategies that the intern may have learned during the internship.
3. The ways that the intern networked within the organization and reflect upon how many connections the intern made during his/her internship.
4. The evaluation of the intern by the supervisor – was there feedback that surprised the intern regarding his/her performance?
5. Outline the importance of thanking the internship supervisor and maintaining a mutually beneficial connection with colleagues that he/she may have made during the internship.
6. Refer the intern to Career Services for strategies on how best to follow up and thank those he/she worked with during the internship.

Stage Six: Re-Entry and Practical Application

Students need to identify and relate the benefits of an internship either as it applies in the classroom or to a post-graduate experience. They may have difficulty translating the learning into skills and insights useful to job search or graduate school applications.

Topics for meeting discussion may include:

1. At this point, simply reminding the intern of how much he/she has learned and achieved, and how prepared he/she is now for future work in this field is helpful.
2. Discuss future plans for work in the same type of industry is also a good idea. Many interns decide they do not want to pursue a career in the industry of their internship, and that's ok too.



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3. Discuss the differences that the intern recognized between an experiential environment as opposed to an academic environment is also relevant.
4. Refer the intern to Career Services to help in adding the internship accomplishments to his/her resume in a meaningful way.

Typical Problems that occur during internships

The following are warning signs that there are some problems occurring with an internship. Inevitably some interns develop problems during their internship, and it important to keep apprised of any issues before they become a big issue. In general, it is usually appropriate to listen to the intern's point of view regarding the conflict, and encourage ways in which the intern can discuss this conflict in a respectful manner with the conflicting person. Coaching the intern on how to appropriately provide a solution to the problem, versus dwelling on the issue is a helpful way to address problems in the workplace. The Academic Internship Coordinator in Career Services may assist in mitigating any conflicts as needed.

- Lack of communication between employer and intern (*usually can take place during stage 2 or 3*).
 - Suggestions of conflict between employer and intern or between the intern and other workers (*usually takes place in stage 2 or 3*).
 - Too much gopher or menial work tasks (stapling, copying, filing, etc.) (*usually can take place in stage 2*).
 - Student lack of responsibility or feelings of underutilization (*can take place in all stages of an internship*).
 - Personal or emotional problems hampering the intern's functioning at work (*can take place in all stages of an internship*).
 - Sexual harassment of the intern or by the intern in the work setting (*usually can take place in stage 3 or stage 4*).
- Please note: It is mandatory under Title IX to respond to any sexual harassment situation. For more information, see [UP's website on Title IX](#).
- Burnout because of over work, perhaps brought on by the student's responsibilities, in and out of the internship (*usually can take place in stages 4 and 5*).