



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY
COMMUNICATION
internship program

SUPERVISOR GUIDE

What is an internship?

An internship is a hands-on working and learning experience that is directly related to a student's field of study. An intern is supervised by a professional with expertise or experience in the professional field. Typically a semester long, internships should be outside of the classroom and may be paid or unpaid, with or without course credit. Because interns are students, not degreed professionals, they should be guided and provided with constructive criticism. Supervisors play a critical role in making internships meaningful. Interns should not be considered unpaid employees who are doing the work of or taking the place of a paid employee. Internships give students the opportunity to gain valuable, applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths; and give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent. However, interns are not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship.

Criteria for an experience to be defined as an internship:

- The experience must be an extension of the classroom: a learning experience that provides for applying the knowledge gained in the classroom. It must not be simply to advance the operations of the employer or be the work that a regular employee would routinely perform.
- There is supervision by a professional with expertise and educational and/or professional background in the field of the experience.
- The skills or knowledge learned must be transferable to other employment settings.
- The experience has a defined beginning and end, and a job description with desired qualifications.
- There are clearly defined learning objectives/goals related to the professional goals of the student's academic coursework.
- There are resources, equipment, and facilities provided by the host employer that support learning objectives/goals.

What is NOT an internship?

While each of the following are valuable experiences both in practice and in building a student's resume, they should not be considered internships. These may be potential alternatives to internships:

- **Shadowing** is when a student visits a workplace and observes professional(s) working in his/her field. This is typically more passive than interning, limited in duration and number of hours, and does not involve the student taking on any tasks or responsibilities.
- **Working as a paid employee but not doing work related to the student's major**, can give the student great opportunities to network and to gain exposure to the "real-world" workplace; however, if the student is not completing tasks that relate to his/her field of study, this would not be an internship. (For example, working as a receptionist for a public relations firm or as a sales associate or cashier in a retail outlet.)
- **Working independently within the field of study but without the supervision of a professional** would be considered a part-time job, not an internship. In some instances, an advanced student may be equipped to take on such a role; however, without a supervisor who is equipped to direct and mentor the student by teaching and giving feedback on the professional tasks, this would lack the learning component that an internship requires. (An example of this would be, a small organization that does not have a marketing or public relations office hiring a student to handle event planning or to manage the organization's social media accounts.)

Paid vs. Unpaid Internships

Students may do paid or unpaid internships when receiving course credit. Paid internships are more desirable for a number of reasons, but unpaid internships are often an appropriate option for both students and hiring organizations. Please review the United States Department of Labor's Fact Sheet on Internship Programs Under the Fair Labor Standards Act to determine if your internship complies with the new standards which were established on January 5, 2018: <https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm>

The National Association of Colleges and Employers also provides a helpful explanation of the new "primary beneficiary" test: <http://www.nacweb.org/public-policy-and-legal/legislation-and-regulations/new-guidelines-for-internships-the-new-unpaid-intern-test/>

When deciding whether the internship should be paid or unpaid, you might consider:

1. Will our organization or the intern be the "primary beneficiary" of the internship?
If the organization stands to benefit from hiring the intern more than the intern will benefit from the experience, the internship should be paid. If the student is the "primary beneficiary," the internship may be unpaid.

Non-profit organizations may hire unpaid interns in a volunteer capacity.
2. Will the internship provide sufficient experience to meet the requirements for course credit? Can we guarantee that the intern will work 10-15 hours per week over an 8-15 week span that corresponds with the university's academic calendar?
If yes, the student might take the internship course and receive academic credit. If fewer than 120 hours over the semester will be required, the intern will not be able to receive course credit, so the position should be paid. If the number of hours are limited and the student is passively observing rather than doing work for the organization, this would be considered job-shadowing. (In the case of job-shadowing, the organization should not benefit at all from the student's presence.)
3. Will the intern be supervised by a professional with expertise in the student's field of study who is capable of providing constructive feedback and oversight?
If the answer to this question is "no," then the position is not considered an internship. The position should be filled by a paid employee.
4. Do we plan to keep the intern for more than one semester?
Because students can only take CO 4053, the Internship in Communication course, once, an internship that lasts beyond one semester and is with a for-profit company should generally be paid.
5. Do we hope for the position to be competitive and to recruit top students to apply?
Paid internships are generally more desirable and more competitive than unpaid internships. Thus, they often attract top-tier students.

Expectations of Supervisors

Supervisors should:

- Have a written position description and conduct a meaningful interview prior to hiring. The hiring process will set the tone for the internship. If it doesn't appear to be a selective process, the intern may take the position less seriously.
- Provide meaningful work opportunities and tasks for the intern to complete that directly relate to his/her field of study. The work should not be simply clerical work or busy work but should provide opportunities to practice and develop skills that he/she has learned in the classroom and will use in the future.
- Complete the necessary e-forms for the student to receive academic credit: a supervisor agreement form at the beginning and end of term evaluation.
- Ensure that the agreed upon number of hours are being made available for the intern to receive course credit. (This is approximately 10-12 hours per week, depending on start/end dates, with a total of 120 hours over the course of the semester.)
- Provide any necessary resources that the intern is expected to use to complete tasks. The intern should not be expected to purchase software or materials to complete work for the organization. These should be provided by the organization.
- Set clear expectations for the intern by discussing goals, objectives, schedules, and tasks that will be completed. Unclear expectations are perhaps the biggest complaint interns have.
- Conduct regular meetings with the intern to provide meaningful feedback on his/her work and provide general professional

- development and mentoring. At the conclusion of the internship, an exit-interview should be held to give any final advice.
- Treat the intern with professionalism and respect and ensure that at least 80% of the internship duties are pre-professional, not clerical.
- Involve the student, as much as possible, in everyday activities/meetings of the organization.
- Aid the student in networking with other professionals in the field whenever possible.

Frequently Asked Questions

How can the supervisor get the word out to MSU Department of Communication students about the internship position?

- The position description should be emailed to the Internship Program coordinator (intern@comm.msstate.edu) so it can be shared with students. Position announcements may be posted on social media, the Communication Department Internship Program website, and departmental bulletin boards.
- If the position will be open each semester, it is easiest to share a stable description that can be shared each semester and does not include specific dates or deadlines. While some students look for positions for the immediate future, others like to look at a list of “ongoing” openings. Hiring organizations may request to be listed on the “ongoing” list that is shared with students throughout the year for maximum reach or may ask to have the position only posted upon request (which may limit the number of applicants.)
- Employers may also register with the MSU Career Center database, Connections. Students frequently access this resource for job and internship postings. To register, visit the “Employer” section of the Career Center website: <http://www.career.msstate.edu/>. This will provide access to students across campus, not just from the Department of Communication.

How do students receive academic credit for internships?

- Students majoring in communication at Mississippi State University may receive academic credit for internships in one of two ways:
 - CO 4053 – Internship in Communication
 - This course is considered an upper-division communication course and will count toward the student’s curriculum requirements. In addition to working 120+ hours at the internship location and being evaluated by the supervisor, the student completes academic work and is graded by the course instructor. This option requires regular tuition and fees and may be taken with a paid or unpaid internship. To take the class, a student must:
 - be a Communication major
 - be a junior or senior
 - have a minimum 2.8 GPA
 - have completed the introductory course(s) in his/her concentration area
 - have a qualified internship in his/her major concentration with 120 hours scheduled to work during the semester in which she/he enrolls in the course. (This is roughly 10-15 hours per week.)
 If the hiring organization desires for the intern to enroll in the above course, the above requirements should be checked during the application and hiring process.
 - Career Center – PPI Course
 - The MSU Career Center offers a Professional Practice Internship (PPI) course. This course provides three hours of non-additive credit, meaning that the hours do not count toward the student’s degree. In order to take this course, the intern is required to work 30-40 hours per week at the internship site.
 - If a student does not meet the requirements for either of these courses, he/she may not be eligible to receive academic credit for the internship. If the internship is with a for-profit organization, it should be paid.

What types of internships do MSU Department of Communication students seek?

- The Mississippi State University Department of Communication has five concentration areas: public relations, journalism, broadcasting, theatre, and communication studies
- Some students will seek positions that specifically target a certain skill set while others may seek internships that cross multiple areas and provide diverse skill development. While students’ interests and skills vary, positions that involve any of the following work tend to be most frequently requested: writing (press releases, news stories, feature stories, promotional

copy, etc.), design, video production, photography, social media creation and management, and event planning. (Other internships that relate to the coursework and curriculum may be appropriate; this list is just intended to show what tends to be most commonly requested.

What paperwork is the supervisor responsible for filling out?

- If a student is taking CO 4053 (described above) to receive course credit for the internship, the supervisor will need to fill out two e-forms, one at the start of the semester to verify the internship and one at the end to evaluate the student intern.
Completion of these forms should coincide with meetings the supervisor holds with the intern to set the expectations for the semester and to provide constructive feedback on his/her work.
- If the student is not receiving course credit, the internship is not officially documented by the university and no paperwork is required.

What does a typical internship schedule look like?

- Typically, one semester, August to December, January to April, or mid-May to July, but may last a full year if it is paid.
- Interns should work with the supervisor to develop a mutually beneficial schedule, and supervisors should consider the intern’s coursework and class schedule when creating the schedule.
- Most interns will work between 10-15 hours per week while taking other courses; however, some interns will work fulltime (30-40 hours per week) for the duration of the semester. Students taking CO 4053 to receive course credit must work 120 hours over the 10-15 week semester.
- Hours should be discussed prior to hiring so that the student and supervisor are on the same page with what to expect. If the position requires the intern to work particular events or a strict schedule, this should be included in the position description.

Are interns “placed” with organizations? How is the hiring process handled?

- Hiring decisions are left up to the organization. Interns will not be placed or recommended by the Communication Department Internship Program. Organizations may choose to vet applicants in a manner consistent with hiring a permanent employee or may approach internship hiring with a more abbreviated process.
- Organizations may choose to request any of the following in vetting applicants: resume, writing or other work samples, references, phone or in-person interview, list of relevant coursework or transcript, anticipated availability or class schedule.
- Note that students must have a minimum 2.8 GPA and be junior or senior standing in order to take CO 4053 to receive course credit for the position. The hiring organization may want to review these qualifications if receiving course credit will be required.

When should we begin looking for interns?

- Students inquire about internships throughout the year, so an “ongoing” position announcement is helpful if the position will be hired on a semester or annual basis. Some students plan as far as a year ahead while others apply to begin internships within a couple of weeks of the start date. However, the peak time for students to apply coincides with the university registration dates:

<i>Internship Semester</i>	<i>University Advising and Registration Period</i>
Fall	Eager students: Late March, early April. Others may wait closer to the end of July or early August.
Spring	October and November
Summer	March and April

Is the intern allowed to rotate between departments?

- Some organizations value the intern rotating to each department to gain a more comprehensive knowledge of the company. If the intern will rotate between departments, it is suggested they rotate in 2-3 week periods, but one consistent supervisor should maintain contact with the intern throughout the experience.

For more information on the Communication Department Internship Program

- Contact the **Communication Department Internship Coordinator, Amy Fountain**, at intern@comm.msstate.edu or **662-325-8938**.