

What You Need to Know About Internships

What is an internship, and how is it different from other forms of work?

"An internship is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skill development in a professional setting. 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. Credit-bearing internships are overseen by a college educator and by a designated employee of an organization. The internship is usually the length or equivalent of an academic term, may be part-time or full-time, paid or unpaid. An integral component of the experience that distinguishes it from other types of work is structured and deliberate learning objectives and corresponding reflection activities."

**Definition informed by the [National Association of Colleges and Employers \(NACE\)](#) and the primary [Internship Professionals listserve](#)*

What specific parameters comprise a quality internship?

- The experience is complementary to and an extension of classroom learning; it allows students to apply what they are learning in a professional setting.
- The employer understands that an internship is first and foremost a learning experience for the student. The benefits to the employer of having an intern are secondary.
- The experience comes with a professional-level job description and desired qualifications. The intern will perform work assignments that result in professional experience and skills that they will take with them following the experience's conclusion.
- There are clearly defined learning objectives/goals related to the student's professional goals.
- Quality and consistent supervision is provided by a professional with expertise and the appropriate educational background. The supervisor invests time in helping the student meet his/her learning objectives, along with orientation and guidance on organizational culture, expectations, and roles.
- There is routine, constructive feedback by the experienced supervisor.
- There are resources, equipment, and facilities provided by the host employer that support the student's learning objectives/goals.

Why do an internship for academic credit?

- Successful completion of credit-bearing internships supervised through the Career and Professional Development are approved to fulfill a student's ELI requirement.
- Many sites only host students who are receiving academic credit for their experience due to liability concerns.

- Corresponding internship coursework helps promotes reflection on and development of personal and professional skills.
- Credit-bearing internships are noted on a student's transcript.
- Students are protected legally under Messiah University's liability policy.
- Students receive support, advocacy and guidance from an Internship Faculty Advisor in addition to their on-site supervisor.