

## PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERNSHIP

Some internships are more formal and carefully packaged than others. A few internships are part of extensive programs that have been developed by organizations over the years and are now thoroughly entrenched within the culture. Other internships are more loosely defined, informal positions that may not have any sort of structure or precedent behind them. Still others are somewhere in between. Wherever your internship falls on this spectrum, you'll want to do all you can ahead of time to prepare for it.

### UNDERSTAND THE 5 STAGES OF YOUR INTERNSHIP

#### Stage 1: Orientation

On the first day of your internship especially, but perhaps even continuing for several days after that, you'll be in the Orientation stage of your internship. You may not really know anyone yet, and you might not know what to do. It's common to feel underutilized and lost, even as you look forward to what's ahead. Know this much: It's all normal. So be patient-with yourself, your supervisor, your colleagues, and what's happening.

#### Stage 2: Navigation

Before long, the first-week nervousness will subside and you'll likely be more familiar with your internship's setting, the people there, and your day-to-day activities. You'll still have lots to learn, but you'll start to feel more settled. Welcome to the Navigation stage of your internship. You're getting used to doing this type of work in this field/industry as it plays out in this particular organization. But often there's still plenty of haze, too. You may also be wondering if you can see yourself in this organization and this field: Are you comfortable in this setting? Can you be yourself here?

#### Stage 3: Competency

A few weeks into your internship, it's common to feel like you have things generally under control. You might understand your job duties much better and carry them out with little need for hands on guidance. You might know your supervisor and co-workers better. Your confidence will naturally grow, and you might even start picturing yourself indeed working in this field/industry or even in this organization-someday. You've reached the Competency stage of your internship. Guard against overconfidence at this point. Maintain your focus and your commitment. Keep doing what you've been doing to get to this place and be prepared to continue seeking help as needed.

#### Stage 4: Excellence

Once you're well established in your internship, your thoughts will likely start going beyond simply carrying out the day-to-day tasks you've been assigned. You may be thinking a little bigger:

- You might seek out additional ways to develop yourself-particularly in the context of the [NACE Core Career Competencies](#) but also in terms of related skills and knowledge areas.
- You might be thinking more about the legacy you want to leave with the organization about how you'll be remembered, in terms of both your personality and your accomplishments. This is the Excellence stage of your internship. Go ahead and think big. Propose solutions to problems you've seen and offer to implement those solutions. Ask questions to see if there is more you can do.

#### Stage 5: Closure

Sooner than you think, your internship experience will come to an end. In this Closure stage, you'll want to wrap up any projects you've been working on, confirm with your supervisor and colleagues that they're satisfied with your performance, and leave your work ready for your successor. You might also be looking toward the future-to, for example, the possibility of a full-time job offer with this organization. You'll be

evaluating your own performance during the internship, and your supervisor will be evaluating it too. You're ready to take on the next career challenge, whatever it may be.

## KNOWN COMMON EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS

Employers have some fairly universal expectations related to professionalism and self-management that you should be aware of before your internship begins.

Here are the characteristics that employers consistently seek in the college students they hire for internships:

- Initiative and self-motivation (generally seen as No. 1 in importance)
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Willingness to learn and take constructive feedback
- Problem solving and critical thinking skills
- Ability to work in teams
- Communication skills (written and oral)
- Solid work ethic
- Attention to detail
- Reliability
- Interpersonal skills (getting along with other people)
- Organizational skills
- Planning skills (establishing priorities and following through on tasks)
- Tact
- Honesty and integrity

### INTERNSHIP TIP

#### *Research Organizations and Assess Workplace Culture*

Research your internship organization's website and social media, LinkedIn.com, and Glassdoor.com to see if the organization has a diversity and inclusion statement or non-discrimination policies and procedures that support diversity. You can review organizational ratings via Diversity Inc or the Human Rights Campaign Best Places to Work. Being informed about your organization's culture before starting your internship will likely help you determine how to navigate your identity once you begin.

One other skill set is becoming increasingly important as well: the appropriate use of technology, especially social media. On the simpler side, employers want some assurance that you will write professional emails, avoiding "textspeak" (i.e., not using capital letters and/or punctuation) and instead using complete sentences and language that is appropriate to the work setting and the industry. On a more complicated note, employers expect you to keep work-related matters off of public forums like your Facebook and Instagram feeds. The expectations for your particular internship will become clearer during your first days in the position.

## YOUR KEY INTERNSHIP GOALS

You decided to pursue an internship for a reason-probably several of them, in fact. Now is a good time to clarify them, so that you can remain mindful of what you're trying to do throughout your entire internship experience.

Here are some key goals you might have for your internship:

- Career Exploration
- Developing Career Competencies
- Networking and Relationship Building
- Collecting Evidence
- Potential Employment (Job) Opportunity

It's one thing to read about a particular career, or even talk to someone working in that career. It's quite another to live it for yourself, if only for a short time.

As your internship begins and throughout the experience itself, be sure to remember: One of its main purposes is to help you understand what a career field (or at least one particular organization in that career field) is really like.

### ***Developing Core Career Competencies***

As we noted earlier in this guide, CSUCI defines the critical concept of career readiness as developing [NACE Core Career Competencies](#):

- Analytical & Critical Thinking
- Teamwork & Leadership
- Applied Problem Solving
- Engaging Diversity
- Ethical Reasoning & Decision Making
- Active Citizenship & Community Engagement
- Innovation & Creativity
- Digital Literacy
- Oral & Written Communication
- Career Management

How can you use your internship to proactively develop these competencies, through both routine, everyday activities as well as any bigger projects you might take on?

## **SUCCEEDING DURING YOUR INTERNSHIP**

You can only prepare for your internship so much, and for so long. Let's look now at what you can do to make your internship the positive, successful experience you want it to be.

### ***Orient Yourself and Identify your Internship Support***

Internship programs that are more formal in nature may have an official orientation; less-formal internships will not. Either way, you need to take ownership of finding the answers to your inevitable questions early on. Your supervisor is your key point of contact. Go to them if you have questions like these:

- Where do I go the first day? Do I check in with anyone in particular?
- How do I dress? (\*When in person internships resume this might be a concern.)
- How do I know what to do? What will I be doing?
- How will I be evaluated, each day and at the end of the internship?
- How will I get to know everyone in the group/department/organization? Do I introduce myself around the office? Do I wait to be introduced? Some combination of both?
- What can I do to be proactive and make this a good experience?
- What if things don't seem to be on track?
- Can I take breaks? Can I snack while I'm working?
- How do expectations differ if some or all of my time is spent off site, working remotely?

This is also the ideal time for you to identify internship support beyond your supervisor. The Career Studio team is here to help. If you have any questions regarding your internship, schedule a virtual Career Counseling session by calling (805) 437-3270 or emailing [career.services@csuci.edu](mailto:career.services@csuci.edu). You also have your academic program team, your faculty advisor, the chair of your major's department, and usually there is an academic analyst for each program as well. You are never alone. Reach out if you need support.

## **Set Goals and Complete an Internship Learning Agreement**

No matter what type of internship you've signed on for, you want the real-world experience you'll gain to lead to something, to help you in the future. In other words, you have internship goals. Now is the time for you to articulate these goals-in your head and then on paper-so you can develop a clear plan for achieving them and obtain academic credit. The last step before you may begin working with your internship site You will need to complete two documents with your site supervisor: *Internship Learning Objectives Agreement* and *Self-Selected Internship Placement Agreement*.

- *Internship Learning Objectives Agreement*  
This document will assist you and your internship supervisor set goals for your upcoming internship.
- [Self-Selected Internship Placement Agreement](#)  
A placement agreement is a critical document that CSUCI needs before you may begin your internship.

The *Internship Learning Objectives Agreement* will help you and your supervisor understand clearly, from the start:

- What you'll be expected to do during your internship-your day-to-day duties and responsibilities-and why.
- What your learning goals are, along with a rationale(s) for each, the action steps you and your supervisor will take to achieve them, and the criteria the two of you will use to objectively measure your success.
- How your duties and learning goals connect with the NACE Core Career Competencies you're trying to further develop.
- As the cover sheet to the *Internship Learning Objectives Agreement* suggests, it's best that you yourself complete a rough draft of the agreement so you can show it to your supervisor on or near the first day of your internship. The two of you can then discuss it and, if necessary, revise it so you come to a consensus on what your internship will look like and what your respective parts in it will be. You'll be on the same page-literally and figuratively-so that your internship experience is the best it can be. For the both of you.
- Another part of your relationship-building process will be simply getting to know your supervisor as a person, and vice versa. So the two of you may want to devote some of your initial meeting time to discussing topics like:
  - Your respective personalities. Maybe, for example, your supervisor is an introvert and isn't necessarily prone to long conversations with you, or to stopping by your cubicle unannounced to see how you're doing. If you happen to be more of an extrovert who likes to talk through ideas and receive frequent verbal feedback, you might wrongly conclude that your supervisor just isn't that interested in you and your activities.
  - Your supervisor's management style. Maybe your supervisor is a hands-off sort of manager; they basically let you be so you can do your work. What if you're the type of person who appreciates closer supervision?
  - Your own learning style. Some people learn best by watching or reading, some by listening, some by doing. What works best for you?
  - Your respective communication styles. You'd like to be able to stop by your supervisor's desk and ask questions as they occur to you. Your supervisor struggles with frequent interruptions-and so would prefer for you to email unless it's an emergency. How might you prevent a potential problem from unfolding?

## Evaluations & Feedback

Throughout your internship, your Site Supervisor or immediate supervisor should be providing feedback on your performance. The assigned mid-term and end-of-the-semester evaluations are to provide performance feedback and criticism to allow you to work on the areas where you need to further develop your career readiness. Evaluations are crucial to the learning process so that you know in which areas your performance is meeting or exceeding employer standards, and in which areas you need to work harder or make changes, as well as suggestions for what those modifications might be to improve your skill set.

The ideal situation for an evaluation would be when an intern's supervisor fills out the evaluation form ahead of time, and then goes over the report and their feedback for improvement with the intern present. This way, the student and supervisor can discuss the assessment: The intern can ask questions, and the supervisor can elaborate on comments and scoring. *Remember:* Evaluations are benchmarks to assist you in improving your career readiness, not critiques on you as an individual.

All academic credit student internship participants are required to submit a self-evaluation in regards to their internship performance and degree of learning. This activity allows each student the opportunity to reflect on their internship experience(s) and gives CSUCI a way to document the professional development our students are enjoying through our internship partners. All evaluations are important. If you are not enrolled in an academic credit internship course, be aware that your internship site may not provide an evaluation. It is up to you to ask your supervisor for continuous feedback.



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## IMPORTANT RESOURCES

### Academic Advising

The Advising Center delivers high quality advising services by providing accurate and timely academic resources, materials and information to the campus community.

Location: Bell Tower, Room 1552

Phone: 805.437.8571

[advisement@csuci.edu](mailto:advisement@csuci.edu)

### Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

CAPS operates from a community systems approach in providing short-term psychological counseling, outreach/prevention, and consultative services to the University community. Services are provided in a safe and supportive environment for our students, faculty and staff.

Location: Bell Tower East, Room 1867  
Phone: 805.437.2088  
[caps@csuci.edu](mailto:caps@csuci.edu)

**Disability Accommodations and Support Services (DASS)**

DASS offers accommodations and resources for students who choose to identify their disability to the University, provide verifying documentation and register for services. Academic accommodations are provided based on disability-related needs under sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Location: Arroyo Hall 210  
Hours: Monday through Friday: 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Closed Saturday and Sunday  
[accommodations@csuci.edu](mailto:accommodations@csuci.edu)

**Title IX & Inclusion**

If you have experienced sexual violence, dating violence, domestic violence or stalking, access information about your rights and options for assistance.

Location: Lindero Hall  
Hours: Monday through Friday: 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Closed Saturday and Sunday  
[titleix@csuci.edu](mailto:titleix@csuci.edu)

**Veterans Resource Center**

Veterans Affairs Program assists prospective and enrolled student veterans and dependents in transitioning and engaging with the campus community to ensure successful progress towards degree completion and on to their career goals.

Location: Bell Tower East, Room 1760  
Hours: Monday through Friday: 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Closed Saturday and Sunday  
Phone: 805.437.3524  
[veterans.services@csuci.edu](mailto:veterans.services@csuci.edu)

Questions? Regarding an internship or any step along the way, contact the Career Development Center.

**Career Development Center**

Location: Bell Tower, Room 1548  
Hours: Monday through Friday, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm  
Phone: 805.437.3270  
[career.services@csuci.edu](mailto:career.services@csuci.edu)  
[go.csuci.edu/cdae](http://go.csuci.edu/cdae)