

Everything You Need to Know about Internships

Relevant industry experience is often an important part of applying for full-time positions. Employers often prefer applicants who have some experience working in positions that may be similar to the one they are offering. If you're new to a particular industry or are still in school, an internship may promote professional growth and help you determine whether the career path you're pursuing is the right fit for you. If you have questions, feel free to check with your Career Coach, Academic Advisor, and/or WKU faculty members.

What is an internship?

An internship is generally a short-term work experience offered by companies and other organizations for people to gain some entry-level exposure to a particular industry or field. It is as much a learning experience as it is work. Ideally, interns spend their time working on relevant projects, learning about the field, making network connections, and developing key hard and soft skills. Internships can be paid or unpaid.

Why are internships important?

Internships are a great way to work side by side with industry professionals to help you get a general idea of what an entry-level role might look like in the organization. It's also a great way to start building your network, from your fellow interns to seasoned leaders. Lastly, companies often use internships as talent pipelines to fill their own full-time positions. In a recent survey from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), employers deemed the completion of an internship as the most influential factor in hiring a given candidate.

Are internships required for all majors at Western Kentucky University?

No. Although all students are encouraged to seek relevant internships during their academic experience, not every major has an internship requirement. It's important to talk with professors and academic advisors to determine if your major requires an internship. If it does, you will need to work through the appropriate department to ensure all details related to placement, course credit, grading, etc. are met. If your major does not require an internship, you can still seek an internship to gain valuable and relevant work experience, but you won't need to seek course credit or get faculty approval to start the internship. The experience you gain can be a valuable addition to your resume!

Tips to Secure an Internship

1. Engage in self-assessment. Knowing yourself plays a huge part in identifying appropriate internship opportunities. It will also help you when interviewing for an internship.
2. Narrow down your options. Decide on things like: What industry? What geographic location? What skills do you want to develop? When is the best time to do the internship? Taking a more targeted approach can help you land the right internship for your career.
3. Prepare your career tools. Visit the Career Center to prepare your resume and cover letter and/or to talk through interviewing strategies. Remember to target your resume and cover letter to the specific internship.
4. Start looking early. Depending on the industry and size of company, you should plan to start your search at least 1 semester before the target start date.
5. Attend WKU career events such as career fairs and employer spotlights. Some employers provide information sessions and on-campus interviews on the spot. Stay up to date through your Handshake account.
6. Network, network, network! Check with your professors or within the academic department to find internships. Ask your family, friends, friends of your family, your friends' family, and on, and on. The more people you talk to, the more opportunities you may uncover.
7. Use a variety of strategies to search for internships. Online job portals such as Handshake or Indeed can be helpful, but this strategy should always be combined with other strategies (e.g., industry-specific online portals, career events, networking, etc.) to increase the probability of securing an internship.
8. Always keep the search process moving forward. It's always tempting to go into a "wait and see" mode when you apply and/or interview for an internship. However, you should continue to proactively search for an internship until you secure one. Don't waste valuable time, energy, and hope in waiting for that one perfect opportunity.
9. At the completion of your internship, make sure to update your resume to include this valuable experience on it.
10. It's important to stay in touch with supervisors and co-workers from your internship. They can be a valuable source of help when you start turning toward a full-time job search.

General Helpful Hints

- The earlier you begin looking, the MORE opportunities you will uncover. It is recommended that you start seeking internships 3-5 months in advance of the potential start date.
- Use a variety of search strategies to seek internships. If you only look at online job portals, you are dramatically limiting your potential opportunities.
- Be sure to keep in touch with your mentor and/or professional contacts that you made during your internship. These people can be valuable contacts and resources for you to use in the future for career advice, or even when you begin looking for a job.

Internships are a great way to try out a career field with minimal commitment. You will also gain professional experience and a competitive edge when you begin applying for jobs and graduate school. Internships look great on a resume. Looking for an internship is much like looking for a job. It is a good practice and will increase your savvy in the job search process before graduation. You will also begin to build a network of professional contacts within an organization and/or industry that will be helpful when looking for a job in the future.

For additional advice on internship search strategies, speak with a [Career Coach](#). Appointments can also be scheduled via email (CareerHelp@wku.edu), or in person (**Downing Student Union 2001, Advising and Career Development Center**).