

Internships and Cooperative Education: Strategy for Gaining the Competitive Edge

Having a college degree is no longer the only deciding factor that employers use when screening and selecting a candidate for their organization. Today's employers expect new graduates to not only have earned a degree but that they also bring employability skills, professional acumen and a proven track record of real world experience. Will your student have the experiences and skills they need to successfully transition into the workplace when they graduate? Do you want to make sure they have the competitive edge they need when they begin searching for their first full-time job? If so, then encourage them to enhance their academic experience by participating in cooperative education or internships before they graduate.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) *Internship and Co-op Survey 2013* and the *Student Survey Class of 2013* found that participating in an internship or cooperative education experience increased a student's chances of obtaining full-time professional employment when compared to a student that had no internship experience. Paid interns also fared significantly better than other job applicants, with the median starting salary for new graduates far higher than that of their counterparts with no internship experience.

Internships and cooperative education provides your student a meaningful learning experience and helps them connect what they're learning in the classroom with the world of work. Credit bearing internships, administered by your student's academic program, requires the student, the employer and the supervising faculty member to agree on learning objectives that your student will be expected to achieve. Establishing learning objective clarifies what your student will learn from the experience and provides guidance for the employer on how to best craft the experience to help your student accomplish his or her learning objectives. In most cases, these learning objectives will reflect skills or content knowledge required for a specific career.

The cooperative education course, administered by USF Career Services, is non-credit bearing, always paid and directly tied to your student's major field of study. . Career Services also posts non-credit bearing internships on its online job posting service, Career Connections. Internships for credit, administered by your student's academic program, may be paid or unpaid. Students

may check with their academic program for specific guidelines and details about internships with their program.

Participating in cooperative education or internships gives your student the competitive edge by helping them:

- Assess whether a current career goal/major reflects their interests, skills, work values and personality traits
- Test out/or affirm whether a particular work environment or career field is a good fit
- Connect what they're learning in the classroom with the work place
- Earn academic credit relevant to their major, if desired
- Defray costs of educational expenses, if working in a paid experience
- Develop and refine professional acumen and employability skills that employers want
- Increase the likelihood of future full time employment with their current employer
- Negotiate for higher starting salary or more advanced position as a full time employee by leveraging their career related work experience
- Establish contacts in the workplace for networking opportunities and gain references for future employment
- Build an evidence-based career portfolio to showcase skills, projects and achievements in the workplace
- Enhance academic knowledge and professional preparation

Help your student gain the competitive edge. Tell them about the value of cooperative education and internships.

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