



## Short Guide to Online/Virtual Internships for colleges, students, and employers

### **What makes a Remote internship different?**

Internships have historically been used to introduce students to the working world. Foundational transferable skills are learned in the internships, as are norms and workplace expectations. They serve as an opportunity for an intern to ask a multitude of questions, given that practically everything about the experience is new. However, remote internships are unique in one primary way – there is no physical office involved and lack of in-person interactions with site supervisors and coworkers.

The drawback of online internships includes the lack of in-person relationship building, immersion in the physical and cultural spaces of a company or organization, and fewer opportunities to engage in ad hoc interactions that typically arise during an on-site experience.

### **What are online, remote, or “micro” internships?**

Virtual internships are internships that are done online or remotely anytime of the year. This allows you to work on a global scale but stay local. You are placed with a company and report to a supervisor. You are in regular contact with that supervisor/team via virtual methods such as a video call, phone call, email and instant messenger. For more information go to Virtual Internships FAQ's page - <https://virtualinternships.com/faqs/>

### **What if I need an in-person internship or similar experience based on my major?**

Unfortunately, in some cases these experiences will need to be postponed until in-person contact within a classroom or clinical setting is allowed and safe. At the present time, many colleges and programs are making decisions about these issues, so the first step is to consult with academic advisors, faculty member, or internship coordinator within your program regarding their decisions.

In fields such as teacher education, nursing, social work and counseling psychology, an in-person practicum or internship is mandatory and required by professional accrediting agencies. In these cases, professional associations or certification boards are currently reviewing how to approach the disruption to many students' fieldplacements.

### **What are the benefits of an online internship given the current situation?**

The primary benefit of an online internship at this point in time is that they can provide students with a safe, work/project-based learning experience that is grounded in an authentic task or project for an organization or company. An online internship can provide students experience with engaging in online project management and communications, which are common modes of project and task performance in many organizations. An online internship includes no travel or housing costs, and thus may be a solution for those who cannot afford to relocate to expensive cities for extended periods. Lastly, an online internship can include new professional contacts, introduction to professional norms, and so on. But for these benefits to be experienced in an online setting, either third-party organizations, employers, or faculty instructors need to carefully design an experience that is more than a mere short-term project out-sourced

to college students.

## For Faculty/Internship Coordinators/Advisors

### What do we do if online internships are unavailable or undesirable for our students?

In some cases, an online internship may not be feasible or desirable, even if an internship or other experiential learning opportunity is required for graduation. In these instances, faculty and departments will need to create projects or learning experiences that are similarly robust and authentic. Some ideas for these projects are:

- Problem-or case-based learning projects that require students to conduct background research on a real-world problem, interview experts in the field, and prepare a report or paper that summarizes a solution or approach to the problem.
- Service or community engaged learning where students work directly with members of the community to conduct a project focused on meeting authentic real-world needs.
- Short reflection papers that require students to reflect on their own progress throughout the experience, including the successful (or not) achievement of their learning goals, issues or challenges faced, and things to work on in the future.
- A Zoom or Skype meeting with students to periodically review their progress in the project.
- Preparation of career related materials such as cover letters or resumes
- Projects that focus on important competencies such as communication, teamwork, and problem solving. These can be embedded in projects mentioned above (e.g. problem-based learning) or can be emphasized in shorter activities such as virtual presentations, learning portfolios, or creating Excel datasets for an assignment.

### What are some policies and procedures that should be part of an effective online internship?

**Ensure viability of intern host organizations:** Confirm that the organization or company is established or legitimate business or organization. This involves documenting that the host has a physical location, a working website, a tax ID number, and contact information that is valid and up to date.

**Adequate and appropriate compensation:** While we would love for all students to have paid internship opportunities, we know this is not the case for a variety of organizations and companies. Therefore, it is good to confirm whether the organization or company will provide compensation to the intern (unpaid or paid opportunity).

**Student Learning:** Confirm with the site supervisor that the online internship project is beneficial for the student and their professional and academic development. The faculty member will need to continually evaluate the academic value of the intern's proposed projects.

**Legal implications:** The legal aspects of an online internship must be carefully considered with the protection, well-being and education of the student the primary concern. Confirm any agreements between

the student and the organization/company. Any legal Affiliation agreement should be forwarded to the Center for Experiential Learning to review and request reviewal, approval and signatures from the Office of the Provost.

**High-quality mentorship:** Faculty will need to evaluate the presence and quality of supervision within an online internship. While in some cases little to no supervision may be acceptable to a college or university, ideally the student will have the opportunity to learn from a professional in their field.

### **Best Practices for Employers offering an online (virtual) internship**

Virtual internships, when properly delivered can be a rewarding experience for both the student, faculty member, and employer. For companies and organizations that are considering hosting virtual internships here are some suggestions:

- Allocate enough time before the start of the virtual internship to
  - Select and test the right equipment/software for managing work
  - Staff training to use the new software/systems (if students are expected to use new software or information technology, it should be provided free of charge).
  - Develop a work plan for the intern, training materials, activities, and tools that the intern will need to be successful in the role.
  - Clearly define expectations for both the intern and the supervisor/mentor. These need to be agreed upon before the start of the internship. Goals and expectations should be reinforced on a regular basis.
- It is essential that all tasks and projects are carefully prepared and planned so the virtual intern will be able to manage the work effectively by themselves. The creation of a written workplan that covers the entirety of the experience is suggested.
- Because the intern will not have the opportunity to have the everyday interactions of the workplace, the materials, instructions and task descriptions need to be well prepared and available online so that they have access to that information when it is needed.
- For the supervisor, it is suggested that you engage the rest of your team in the delivery of the virtual internship experience. By doing this the intern will have the opportunity to interact with several individuals throughout the course of the experience. Team members need to be committed and available to engage with virtual interns on a daily basis (and sometimes multiple times a day).
- Create and deliver a well-balanced experience for the intern that includes the opportunity for the intern to:
  - Learn about the organization
  - Focus on professional development
  - Engage in meaningful projects and work that will help to develop their overall ability to become a valuable member in the future.
- Put a mechanism in place to track the intern's hours (daily or weekly work log) to ensure they are meeting university required internship hours if for academic credit.

#### **Resources for employers delivering a virtual internship experience:**

- Face to Face Communication – [GoToMeeting](#), [Zoom](#), FaceTime, [WebEx](#), [Zoho Meetings](#), etc.
- Other communication tools – [Slack](#), Email, Instant Messenger, etc.

- Free Project Management Tools – [Asana](#), [OpenProject](#), [nTask](#), [Monday](#), etc.
- Online file sharing – [DropBox](#), [Box](#), [GoFile](#), Google Drive, etc.

## Resources for online internships and other forms of experiential learning

There are several third-party companies and organizations that serve as brokers or “middle-men” between postsecondary institutions or students and employers. Here at LUC **we do not endorse any particular organization or service** but want to share with the broader community these resources that students, colleges and advisors may not be aware of. In addition, colleges and universities should be aware that with the COVID-19 pandemic, more vendors are appearing to advocate for and support online internships.

Finally, if interacting with any of the resources and organizations below, postsecondary institutions should be considered whether there is a cost to the student, to the institution, and/or to the employer. Different vendors have different approaches, and precisely who pays for what and other financial constraints or arrangements should be closely and carefully scrutinized.

Besides offering ideas and opportunities for students, some of these organizations also may provide assistance to postsecondary institutions in migrating traditional internships to online platforms.

### Third-party facilitators of online internships between employers and students

Virtual Internships:

<https://virtualinternships.com/>

Parker Dewey: <https://www.parkerdewey.com/>

Symba: <https://symba.io/>

### Other resources on internships

Pay our Interns: <https://payourinterns.org/>

Chegg Internships: <https://www.internships.com/>

University of Wisconsin System Career Connect: <https://www.wisconsin.edu/career-connect/>

### Organizations that provides faculty with ideas for course-based projects

Riipen: <https://riipen.com/>

Parker Dewey: <https://www.parkerdewey.com/>

### Other resources on online internships

Intern Bridge: <https://internbridge.com/>

InternQube (resource guide for online internships): <https://www.internqube.com/articles.html>

### Essay on micro-internships and the gig economy by Julia Freeland Fisher

<https://www.christenseninstitute.org/blog/micro-internships-just-a-gig-or-a-promising-gateway/>

### Other essays and observations on online internships

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Micro-Internships-/245470>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jasonwingard/2019/03/06/why-micro-internships-will-be-the-next-big-thing/#3505f0fb700c>

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