

Internship Guidelines

Updated May 8, 2026

To ensure that an experience is educational, and thus eligible to be considered a legitimate internship, all the following criteria must be met (NACE, 2026):

- The experience must be an extension of the classroom: a learning experience that provides for applying the knowledge gained in the classroom. It must not be simply to advance the operations of the employer or be the work that a regular employee would routinely perform.
- The experience has a defined beginning and end (typically one semester in length or 15 weeks) and a job description with desired qualifications.
- There are clearly defined learning objectives/goals related to the professional goals of the student's academic coursework.
- There is supervision by a professional with expertise and educational and/or professional background in the field of the study.
- There is routine feedback by the supervisor and a formal evaluation conducted at the end of the experience.
- There are resources, equipment, and facilities provided by the employer that support learning objectives/goals.
- The experience does not take place in a private home.

In order to ensure that minimum standards are met for an internship, the Career Center has established the following internship guidelines for internship site employers and supervisors.

I. Opportunity for Student to Apply Principles Learned Inside and Outside Classroom

A well-structured internship program should provide students with hands-on experience that will compliment and make the most of classroom learning. It should introduce to the student the switch from college to career and help facilitate that transition. Students should be able to directly apply knowledge and transferable skills learned inside the classroom that relate to the internship program and enjoy the experience.

II. Provide Interns with Real Work Assignments

Interns should be doing work related to their major, that is challenging, that is recognized by the organization as valuable, and that fills the entire internship term. Intern supervisors or hiring managers should emphasize the importance of real work assignments during a manager/mentor orientation and communicate with the student interns frequently throughout the entire internship term.

III. Hold Orientations and Provide Interns with Guidance via an Intern Handbook and/or Website

All interns should be on the same page and in making sure they are, the intern supervisor and/or hiring manager should hold an orientation session for managers and students. This ensures that everyone starts with the same expectations and understands their roles. Student interns should also be provided with a handbook or hard copy of

a special presentation that serves as a guide to students. The handbook and/or website should detail FAQs and communicate the “standards” in a welcoming way.

IV. Opportunity to Observe Professionals in Action

Students should be given the opportunity to observe working professionals in their particular field of study in order to gain an understanding of the type of work the occupation involves. When appropriate, interns should be allowed the opportunity to sit in meetings, attend presentations, and meet with clients. Additionally, interns should be allowed to speak with professional inside and outside of their department to learn about other occupations and career paths.

V. Opportunity to Develop New Skills

At the conclusion of the internship, students should have developed new skills and improve on existing skills. We encourage internships that focus on the following areas:

- Research skills
- Writing skills
- Technical skills that are appropriate to the field of study
- Presentational speaking skills

VI. Evaluation and Feedback to Student and Institution

Effective supervision throughout the entire internship process makes for a more satisfactory experience for the student and company. In the middle of the semester, the faculty internship coordinator may provide a mid-semester evaluation to review with students to determine whether the intern’s role and responsibilities are being fulfilled. At the end of the semester a final evaluation is provided to the agency which is the most significant aspect to the intern’s grade (if for Academic Credit) and/or experience. Providing an intern with feedback about his or her performance and skill set provides a great learning opportunity for the student.

VII. Paid and Non-Paid Internships

Internship programs are designed to provide the student the opportunity for professional experiences and should be selected on the basis of their educational quality. UTRGV Career Center encourages the internship to be a paid experience. The internship coordinator must be informed in advance if an intern student is accepting payment for fulfilling the required internship hours. It is not required to have to pay interns who qualify as trainees. If you choose not to pay them, we recommend you review the U.S. Department of Labor’s guidelines and requirements regarding non-paid students and consult with your legal advisor. On the other hand, if you decide to pay an intern they must be paid in accordance with the Fair Labor Standards Act (Review U.S. Department of Labor’s Fact Sheets 13, 14A, and 71 at www.dol.gov).

VIII. Safe Work Environment

The internship site is held responsible for the safety of student interns. For safety reasons, interns are not allowed to work out of individual’s homes and participation of door to door sales is strictly prohibited.

IX. Non-Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

In an effort to provide a safe environment and educational experience, we require internship sites to uphold the following standards:

All internship employers must meet The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's Non-Discrimination Policy (<http://www.utrgv.edu/hop/policies/adm-03-100.pdf>) that prohibits unlawful discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, including sexual harassment, age, disability, citizenship, and veteran status.

All internship sites must also abide by and support The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's Sexual Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy defined below:

Sexual misconduct. Includes inappropriate sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

Sexual harassment. As prohibited by state and federal laws, is defined as: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when (a.) submission to which such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment or education; or (b.) submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for academic or employment decisions affecting that individual; or (c.) such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's academic or professional performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive employment or education environment.

For more information, please review The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's Handbook of Operating Procedures with regards to Sexual Harassment and Sexual Misconduct.

(<http://www.utrgv.edu/hop/policies/adm-03-300.pdf>)