

Internship Procedures

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY &
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

This document was approved
by G&ES faculty 10/28/08



A 3 credit hour internship course in the Department is required of Environmental Studies students, who are (160 work hours). This is done near the end of the student's program. Geography majors studying GIS may choose to take a 3 credit hour Internship with GIS (G&ES 395; 160 work hours). When possible, work should be completed in large blocks of time to best simulate an actual work environment. The internship experience gives the student practical experience in their field and often begins an environmental career and/or one using geospatial technologies.

For many, the experience is their first job in a new field. Internships are often used by employers to train and evaluate potential full time employees. Strong letters of recommendation from a previous employer are very valuable.

PLANNING THE INTERNSHIP

It is the student's responsibility to locate an internship, although there are resources within the department which may be useful. The department's email list is often used to announce internship opportunities. The department chairperson maintains a collection of all recent internship reports which students may look through. Advisors are also able to help in the selection process. Most employers have been very pleased and will gladly take on another intern from the department. We also have several prearranged internship slots – one on campus (dealing with green technology projects), is filled competitively.

There are professional career counselors available at NEIU which might be useful. However, the following types of questions may help a student find an appropriate internship.

- What are your scheduling constraints, and spatial constraints?
- What are your post-graduate plans? Higher degree (field?) Employment (what type?)
- What special skills, knowledge, and enthusiasm will you bring to the workplace?
- What skills or knowledge would you like to gain in this internship?
- Would you prefer to work indoors or outdoors, or a combination of both?
- Do you most like working with people, with nature, with technology?

Before a student enrolls or starts work, he/she must, with the faculty advisor and employer/supervisor, draw up a “contract” or agreement stating what the student will do and what experiences he or she will get. The form is available from the department's web site. It is divided vertically. To the left is what services the student will provide and matching to the right is what the employer will provide.

Faculty advisor, employer-supervisor, and student sign the form when the agreement indicates work to be performed, appropriate supervision, and considerable educational gain for the student. The form may be referred to by either party during the experience. Following is a portion of a hypothetical agreement.

Student will do

Employer will provide

Create maps and graphics for newsletter

Access and training for Microsoft Publisher
Access to interview staff members

Lead school groups through the park

Training and supervision

Contribute to <specify project>

Assignments relating to <specify project>

Complete reports for EPA

Training on State and Federal regulations

Regular supervision and feedback with midway
and final evaluation

In addition to the internship agreement (above), students must also complete the Internship Contact Form and write a one-page summary of the plan, which reflects the same things which are in the agreement, but in narrative form.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Students undertaking an internship are not excused from any responsibility of their other classes; this includes attendance. When in the field, students represent not only themselves but the Department and the University as well. They must present themselves accurately to employers and behave professionally throughout the internship. They are not to engage in activities which are unsafe. They must communicate with their faculty advisor at least every other week, reporting (1) activities with some detail and (2) cumulative hours worked.

If problems of any kind arise within the internship, the intern shall communicate with the employer-supervisor immediately, and report the situation and outcome to the faculty advisor in the next biweekly report. If the problem is not resolved, the student shall contact the faculty advisor immediately to discuss how to best resolve the issue.

After the internship is complete (160 or 320 hours) the student must prepare a folder or binder with the following information:

1. copy of original agreement
2. contact and information form, completed
3. concatenation of biweekly reports
4. one or two page objective summary of the experience
5. 3-5 page reflective essay

This subjective essay is normally very positive because most internships work out well for both student and employer/supervisor. Important criticism or negative feedback should also be given at this time, either as part of the main report or, if desired, in a separate attachment which (when indicated) will be available only to G&ES advisors.

Content of the subjective report will depend on the experience. It may include details on how the internship helped prepare the student for employment, what it meant for their personal and professional development, and what tasks, assignments or supervision was particularly valuable. It may also comment on the workplace environment. The reflective report will give other students who might be considering the internship more insight into the opportunity.

Occasionally the student will be critical of aspects of the experience, yet not want this to become public record. In such cases they may write a separate narrative marked "confidential." This will be made available only to faculty advisors.

FACULTY-ADVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

The faculty advisor must contact the employer supervisor prior to the internship. A standard letter (attached) may be used if appropriate. It is the faculty advisor's responsibility to ensure that the internship goes as well as possible. He or she must intervene when necessary on behalf of the employer or the student.

The advisor shall read the biweekly reports and attend to other communication from the student and the employer-supervisor promptly. In the case of unresolved problems which require faculty intervention, the faculty-advisor shall communicate with the complainant before contacting the other party, to determine the best way to resolve the issue.

For a 6 credit hour internship the faculty-advisor should contact the employer about half way through, to verify that the student is performing well. At this time it is helpful to discuss grading (see below) and if the intern has been doing less than A work, inquire how he or she might improve his or her performance. This information should be passed on to the student.

At the end of the internship the faculty advisor must contact the employer supervisor for final evaluation. Typical questions would include

1. Was the student mature and reliable?
2. Did he/she have the skills and abilities promised?
3. Did they communicate well and seek advice when needed?
4. Were they able to work alone – assign a task and they would complete it?
5. Did they work well with others?
6. Were you able to offer them the learning experience you intended?
7. Did they excel in some way – perform better than expected – and if so, how so?
8. Where there any unexpected problems that affected the internship?
9. How well were they able to learn and apply new skills and knowledge?

And the employer should be given the opportunity to suggest a grade. The following guidelines may be helpful:

- A. Reliable, responsible, excellent skills, performed better than expected – the type of person they would hire if they could
- B. Good worker, performed assigned tasks. Met but did not exceed expectations
- C. Useful intern but with some unexpected problems. Not a failure but clearly could/should have been better.
- D. Some serious issues with reliability, maturity, responsibility, attendance, attitude or dependability. Not successful
- F. Total failure to perform. Mostly absent. Complete loss.

The faculty member must receive the packet from the student, and communicate with the employer, before assigning a grade. A written assessment shall be provided to the student, along with the letter grade.

The completed packet must be given to the Department Chair for filing in the Internship records, which are available to other students. Subsequent internships may not be initiated until these reports are received.

EMPLOYER-SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

The employer-supervisor takes an equal part drawing up the Internship Agreement, and signs when it accurately reflects their expectations and commitments. This is done in advance of the internship. During the internship, the employer-supervisor is responsible for assigning and supervising work and maintaining a record of number of hours worked. Employer-supervisors should provide their intern with regular feedback on their performance, and may contact the faculty supervisor at any time.

There are no "midterm grades" in an internship, but if the performance is not at the A-level (described above), the supervisor should attempt to encourage the student to improve their performance.

If something goes wrong with the internship along the way the employer must address the issue with the student immediately. If a serious problem remains, the employer shall contact the faculty advisor immediately to discuss how best to resolve the problem.

At the completion of the internship the employer-supervisor can expect a call from the faculty-supervisor in which they will discuss the experience. At this time the employer-supervisor may suggest a grade using a rubric like the one above.

The employer supervisor provides a written assessment for the student and sends a copy to the faculty-advisor. This statement will not go in the public folder.