What Makes a Good Internship

Elon Internship Description
An internship is a carefully monitored work or service experience that relates to the student’s academic curriculum and/or career goals and earns academic credit.

As a unique form of engaged learning, an internship:
• is a credit-based educational strategy that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with work-based learning in a professional setting
• is an academic endeavor that is planned with intentional learning goals, careful observation, and structured critical reflection about the phenomena being studied/observed
• enhances academic knowledge, personal development, and professional preparation
• is offered by almost all majors at Elon University
• can be part-time or full-time during any term
• can be paid or unpaid
• is noted on both the academic and co-curricular transcripts

Experiential Education
“Experiential education, which takes students into the community, helps students both to bridge classroom study and life in the world and to transform inert knowledge into knowledge-in-use. It rests on theories of experiential learning, a process whereby the learner interacts with the world and integrates new learning into old constructs.”
—Janet Eyler in Liberal Education Fall 2009, Association of American Colleges and Universities

What Makes a Good Internship?
• Faculty sponsor, on-site supervisor and student understand the educational function of the internship and the effort to connect classroom study with authentic work world situations.
• Process involves student, on-site supervisor, and faculty sponsor as partners in setting initial goals, offering feedback, and evaluation.
• Intern is challenged with new and substantive progression of tasks
• Intern has a chance to gain feedback and reflect on the learning — academic, professional, organizational, personal, and ethical — in order to integrate knowledge and experience.

Key Elements to Consider in an Ideal Internship
These elements may evolve in partnership with the organization, the university and the student. The order is flexible.

Intention
• Explain learning process
• Delineate expected learning outcomes that may result; focus on measurable learning objectives
• Understand why the student wants to do internship and identify knowledge/skills needed
• Understand why the company wants an intern
• Outline tasks/projects to be accomplished – assign meaningful tasks that require professional responsibility whenever possible
• Prioritize project list and reach agreement
• Have major ongoing project for student to return to when all other assignments are completed
• Explain evaluation process and determine how internship will be documented

Training
• Training is a pivotal factor in intern success. Spend adequate time in introductions, cultural understanding, orientation to office organizational and physical structure, dress code, and job duties.
• Have appropriate space and equipment ready
• The site supervisor should be a professional who understands the objectives of an academic internship program

Reflection
• Learning relies on relationships – frequent informal contact plus structured opportunities for critical analysis can transform the internship into a learning experience.
• Organizational “guide-by-the-side” anchors intern and drives learning
• Monitor learning objectives and outcomes throughout – provide feedback
• Encourage adaptation in response to feedback

Assessment & Evaluation
• Establish systematic procedures to document and refine initial intentions and quality outcomes
• The university will provide evaluation forms to the organization and the student
• Partners will confer periodically during the experience to discuss learning progress
• Students receiving credit will complete academic assignments for the university
• The university faculty sponsor may do a site visit if appropriate
• Acknowledge and celebrate internship experience

If you have a general internship position, one for arts and sciences students, or want to develop an internship program, please contact Robin Kazmarek, Internship Director (336-278-6538, rkazmarek@elon.edu).

For communication internships please contact Amber Moser, Internship Director for the School of Communications (336-278-6336, amoser2@elon.edu).

For business internships please contact Lauren Bosselait, Internship Director for the Love School of Business (336-278-6065, lbosselait@elon.edu).