What Does a Good Internship Look Like?

Gonzaga University Viewpoint, from the Be Inspired publication:

Much more than engaging minds, what we do at Gonzaga University engages the whole person. Our mission asserts that education should never be confined to the classroom. The Gonzaga Community is committed to the Jesuit ideals of developing one’s total self-intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. At Gonzaga, students learn how to learn, think critically, and discover an engagement with life that is vigorous and contagious. What captures heart, mind, and soul affects everything….it is the very source of inspiration.

(The goal of the GU Internship program – supporting the education of the whole person through meaningful field learning experiences).

Student Viewpoint

A Quality Internship will offer me:

• **An opportunity for input from the start.** This may include having a part in shaping goals or learning outcomes; even helping to design the experience. A student who is a true partner tends to own the experience more, and is motivated to achieve the learning.

• **A clear job description.** Specific and well-articulated details outlining what is expected and/or designed for learning is essential, and makes all the difference for the student who is seeking training.

• **A chance to practice and apply my classroom knowledge and training.** Making connections between the academic life of ideas and knowledge and that of the real workplace bridges the core studies of Jesuit principles of social justice and human betterment. Being able to apply learning in real ways is especially relevant for the GU student trained in liberal humanistic education.

• **Effective supervision or mentorship.** Each intern will need consistent and regular direction and feedback. Assigning one supervisor or mentor and creating timely meetings for assessment creates growth and meaning for all. This is especially important at the close of the internship where valuable reflection can occur.

• **Assigned work that is meaningful.** Though every job has rote chores, an intern is also ready to be charged with responsibility. Getting to practice creative problem solving, being a part of a team with a project, and learning new skills is central to valuable field learning.

• **An opportunity to earn credit and/or be paid.** The fundamental reason for interning is to learn the art and craft of the workplace. However, affording a college education requires most students to work for wages to help support mounting tuition and living expenses. Though some non-profit organizations have no other recourse, there is increased debate on the ethics of asking students to work without pay. Earning credit helps to satisfy requirements, and is for many students a balancing element.

• **A well-functioning and professional working environment where interpersonal dynamics reflect the best behaviors.** Students learn through observation and engagement. When training a new and young work force, demonstrating best practices of effective working relations and healthy working environments makes all the difference in shaping standards for this essential part of professional life.

• **An opportunity to build relationships, network, and cement contacts.** Students have come to understand the importance of sustained relationships with those in the career fields of their choice. These contacts have the power for encouragement, guidance, and mentorship long after an internship is completed. This can be a prized, long term incentive for many students.

• **A chance for reflection.** Summarizing and recording what a student has learned and experienced, significantly aids in any long term benefits. The original goals have a chance have a chance to be assessed in context to the final outcomes; while the internal reflection helps to place the experience and give it structure.
Employer Viewpoint

A Quality Internship will provide:

- A clearly defined role in the organization, a clear designated workspace. Giving an intern a title, job description, and identified working space helps to create investment and ownership in the assigned work. When perimeters are specific, it directly affects a student’s performance and outcomes. Success can be measured and achieved best when there are clear expectations marking the way.

- Well defined learning objectives that are consistent with the student’s academic course of study. While the employer’s role is not in the academic classroom, it is nevertheless an important bridge between academic knowledge and its application in the workplace. A quality internship should involve and make a connection to academic training. Understanding the course of study within the student’s major; blending it with core practices of the industry, and finally collaborating with the academic institution to craft relevant learning objectives is central to the best practices of both places. With clear objectives come more precise and measurable outcomes.

- Opportunity to see realistic, on-the-job tasks representative of the industry. A student arrives to learn. More than anything a student is choosing an internship in this industry to understand what a career in this field would look and feel like. Having accurate and realistic assignments that truly represent the nature of work empowers the student with necessary information and insight. It also creates a fertile training ground from which future, well qualified young employees can be drawn.

- Opportunity for collaboration with professionals working in the field. Students recognize the importance of sound communication skills and seek to practice them. These are essential to effective collaborating, teamwork, and productivity. A quality internship provides moments for productive interaction with the practitioners of the trade. Students learn strategically when they can observe and interact. Building professional relationships not only creates networking opportunities, it enriches the culture of the workplace.

- Opportunity for challenge (a relevant project reflecting the work of this industry): Student interns produce the most when given a challenge. Nothing is more impactful than a chance to work on a project from inception to completion. When a student can exercise creativity, solve a problem, make a decision; when they see their work has relevance and will make a difference in the company, then quality learning has taken place, and it enriches everyone.

- Consistent mentoring, training, and feedback for performance. These areas are essential. Both the intern and the company prosper most when there is direct supervision. A student relies on active and accurate appraisal and direction. Attentive mentorship creates effective learning outcomes and enriches the program. It also creates strong models for sound working relationships.

- Exposure to as many parts of the operations of the organization as is relevant to thorough understanding of the industry and the course of study. Making sure the intern is not silo-ed into just one set of tasks ensures a quality field experience. The wider the exposure to parts of the organization broadens understanding and increases education.

- A social atmosphere where productive behavioral dynamics can be observed and modeled; where artfulness in professional and inter-personal relationships can be practiced. Work place dynamics can be complex. As an intern, a student watches everything carefully for the purpose of learning. Perpetuating high standards in conduct, maturity and professionalism has the best long term effect on the training of a young worker. It also adds character and wellness to the workplace.

Faculty Viewpoint

A Quality Internship must include:

- A means to earn academic credit
- A well-constructed set of learning objectives with means for assessment
- Advising and supervision from a faculty member
- Adequate mechanism for review: progress and exit work
- Efficient administrative support