

Virtual Internship

What is an online internship?

Virtual internships can be done online or remotely anytime of the year. This allows a student to work on a global scale, but also stay local (if necessary). When done properly they can be a rewarding experience for both the intern(s) and employer. Virtual internships, much like in-person internships need to be carefully crafted with set goals, policies, and a clear written plan.

Here are some suggestions to creating a virtual internship:

- Adapt existing resources: Intern Handbook, Welcome Packets, or On-boarding procedures to fit the virtual platform. Organization can use wh
- Before the virtual internship:
 - Select and test the right software for managing work. Ensure the intern(s) will have or gets access.
 - Develop a workable plan for the intern(s). This may include, training materials, activities, or tools that the intern(s) need to be successful.
 - Clearly define expectations for the intern(s) and the supervisor/mentor. These should be agreed upon before the start of the internship. These goals/expectations should be reinforced on a regular bases. If you need help with these, please see “Developing an Internship Program Information”.
- The intern(s) will not have the everyday interactions of the workplace. Create a plan that outlines tasks, projects, and deadlines. This will allow the intern to manage work effectively by themselves. **Creating a written plan that covers the entire experience is suggested.**
- For the supervisor, make sure you engage key members of your team to support the internship experience. Who are those key employees? How will they manage incorporating the new responsibility of managing an intern into their workday/workweek? **Teams members need to commit to engage virtual intern(s) on a daily basis.**
- Create a balanced experience the mutually beneficial to the intern(s) and the organization. Some things to think about:
 - Educating students about your organization
 - Focus on Professional Development
 - Meaningful projects that enhance an interns skill level and develop their ability to become a valuable member of the team in the future.

Best Practices of Virtual Internships:

- **Flexibility-** be considerate and flexible given the current climate.
- **Communication-** make sure interns know who to reach with questions or concerns. Foster an approachable culture.
- **Beware of biases and blind spots-** With an increase in virtual interviews it is important to be mindful of these. Work with your recruiting team to educate them on the challenges students are facing. Make sure they are prepared to engage students with warmth and understanding.
- **Create a stress-free recruitment experience-** create a job description that clearly outlines expectations, utilize the resources at WKU to help with your recruitment process, perfect your virtual interviewing platforms, provide clear timelines for recruitment (especially during this time of anxiety and uncertainty).
- **Help foster company relationships-** help the intern develop connections within the company, meet employees virtually, and learn about resources to support them during their time of employment.

Situations to Watch-out for or items to think about as you are formulating an online internship:

- How will your organization overcome lack of in-person relationship building, immersion in the physical culture of an organization?
- How can your organization support the soft-skill development that is crucial to a intern(s) career success?
- Many companies use internships as a path to full-time employment. How does your organization overcome and fit virtual internships into your future employment needs?

Virtual Internship Recruitment

Be aware of your timeline and the University academic calendar so that the job description is written, posted, and you are receiving applicants the semester prior to needing an intern.

WKU uses an online recruitment database called Handshake. All employers are encouraged to establish an account and post opportunities to recruit WKU students. To set up an account on Handshake visit https://app.joinhandshake.com/login?requested_authentication_method=standard.

In addition to posting on Handshake, employers are encouraged to develop relationships with the Internship Coordinator who can assist with advertisement of the internship, assistance with recruitment, as well as on-campus interview arrangement. Many internship employers feel that recruiting on campus and having face time with students is a crucial recruitment tool and has allowed them to develop personal connections with students, which in turn leads to hiring the right candidate for the position.

Ogden College of Science and Engineering has additional ways to create brand awareness and develop a connection with students and the college. Employers are encouraged to participate in Networking events, Career Fairs, Lunch and Learns, and any other activities where employers can engage with students. If you are interested in learning more about partnership opportunities please contact the Internship Coordinator, 270-745-2574.

Become informed about Intern Legalties

Just as all employees are, interns have rights and are protected by law. If you have questions, you can view the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). For information around hiring international students with visas, contact the WKU International Office at iem@wku.edu or (270)745-4857.

Hire your Intern!

Once you have received applicant resumes and have your candidates chosen, it is time to interview those candidates. Students are prepared to interview in person, via phone, or virtually. The WKU Career Services has interview rooms available for employers to reserve at no charge (contact EmployerRelations@wku.edu) or if you would like to interview in the Gordon Ford College of Business, you can also reserve a conference room by contacting the Internship Coordinator at 270-745-2574

Once your intern has been chosen, please be sure to include the description of duties, preferred weekly schedule, and final pay information when making the intern offer. Now that you have hired your intern – *CONGRATS!* While it is the responsibility of the student to manage their work and internship requirements, the best practice we advise is to be involved and start the intern experience with training and goal setting.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to the Internship Coordinator, Liz Fogle at liz.fogle@wku.edu, or (270) 745-2574