

Elements of a Successful Virtual Internship

If a virtual internship is proposed by a student, or offered by a prospective internship site, the following components should be considered prior to final approval:

- The organization must be an established, legitimate business or non-profit, as evidenced by considerations such as a physical location, website, history of offering paid employment, listed telephone number, tax ID number, etc. The college may choose to authorize a virtual internship with an individual, but that individual needs to agree to a thorough background check.
- The organization must agree to offer an internship that meets the criteria of a legitimate internship as outlined by NACE, the National Association of Colleges and Employers:
 1. 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.
 2. The skills or knowledge learned must be transferable to other employment settings.
 3. The experience has a defined beginning and end, and a job description with desired qualifications.
 4. There are clearly defined learning objectives related to the student's professional goals.
 5. There is supervision by a professional with expertise and educational and/or professional background in the field of the experience.
 6. There is routine feedback by the experienced supervisor.
 7. There are resources, equipment, and facilities provided by the host employer that support learning objectives/goals.
- The organization must agree to a site visit from a representative of the college.
- The organization and student (with advisor approval) need to agree on a clear, detailed position description which covers all expectations and outlines what will constitute a successful internship.
- The organization's internship site mentor must provide the student with regular supervision, mentoring, and feedback as outlined in #5 and #6. In a virtual internship, this will include:
 - Use of a company intranet or virtual workspace on a server, or an online project management or document-sharing tool, such as Office 365, Google Docs, or a similar program. This will allow the supervisor to go online and monitor the work which is to be completed. The work is stored in the "cloud," not on a single PC, so it is always available to those who need it.
 - A regularly-scheduled email report in which the student provides information to the internship site mentor and the academic advisor, such as hours worked, challenges or problems encountered, progress toward learning objectives, and any questions they may have.
 - A weekly virtual meeting on Skype, GMail video chat or a similar technology. This meeting will be used to provide more personalized feedback to the student and correct any issues.
 - If the virtual internship is in the local area (a reasonable drive from campus), the employer needs to meet with the student in a public place (e.g., coffee shop, restaurant) once a week. This face-to-face meeting is a time for project planning, review of progress made, feedback, and mentoring.
- The organization should make the virtual intern a part of regular operations as much as possible; for example, including them in face-to-face opportunities such as company meetings or client visits.
- The student must provide the faculty advisor or internship professor with the outputs of the internship (e.g., written materials produced, analysis completed)