

Investing into Your Future Career Skills

One way to make yourself stand out from the crowd after graduation is to have some work experience related to your major. This may include a practicum, internship, cooperative learning, job shadow experience, or volunteer experience. Another bonus to participating in one or more of these opportunities is growing your profession network. You will gain people in your chosen field to talk shop with, share job opportunities they know about, and impart knowledge about the job that isn't found in books. If the experience is long enough and you do well you may be able to ask for a reference. If you are planning to pursue your master's degree or a specialized program such as veterinarian school, you may need a certain amount of one or more of these in order to apply. You should make sure you research the schools and programs you will be applying to so you can complete any requirements before you apply.

Let's begin by talking about the differences in each of these so that you can determine what the best route for you would be.

Job Shadow Experience- A student who participates in job shadowing is able to observe what a particular job is like. It is a great experience to take part in if you are unsure if you would like that career or not. Job shadowing can occur one time or multiple times depending the student and the person they are shadowing. It does not earn college credit and is not a paid opportunity. Job shadowing hours can be used to fulfill TN Promise requirements as well.

Volunteer Experience- This is especially popular for those interested in social or health sciences. It may or may not give experience in the exact career one is going into, but can give a lot of knowledge of similar careers, particular companies, and increase your communication and people skills. Some examples would include volunteering at a non-profit agency, library, nursing home, or animal shelter. If you volunteer over a long period of time you can build connections with people in those agencies and gain soft skills and experience. Volunteering hours can be used to fulfill TN Promise requirements. There are some colleges who have programs that reward volunteering with scholarships such as Bonner's Scholars Program.

Practicum-This may also be referred to as an externship. Typically, these are tried with a class and a student will earn college credit. The main role is to allow a student to observe and take notes. Occasionally a student will be able to do some tasks under supervision, but these are limited. The time commitment is around 10 hours a week and is not paid. A student participating in a practicum has a chance to learn what the job entails as well as some hands on experience.

Internship- An internship is more intense than a practicum as the amount of work hours and job responsibilities increase. The hours can even mimic a full time working schedule. The student will work under supervision at the site as well as have someone from the school come to monitor their progress. An internship may be paid or unpaid. If it is through the school and is required for graduation it is often unpaid in money but does give college credit. An example of this would be student teaching requirements for those pursuing an education degree. A student participating in an internship is able to gain a lot of hands on experience as they complete the same tasks as one would in the job itself with the only difference being they are supervised. Often an internship pairs work experience with an internship class at the college. A student must meet certain competencies set out in their class curriculum while at the internship site. Usually an internship is only one semester at the undergraduate level, but can be two semesters for certain programs.

Cooperative Learning- Cooperative learning is similar to an internship in that a student combines classroom learning with supervised work experience. A cooperative is set up between the school, work site, and the student. It is often longer than one semester (so one year or longer) and will alternate class time with in the field time. Usually a cooperative learning experience is paid.

Now that you recognize the importance and benefits of an internship, you might wonder how and where can you find one? Improving your chances at landing a college internship often starts with finding (and applying) for as many as possible- so as long as they align, with your career goals. The more options you have, the better your chances.

1. **Start by asking your school about internships.** This should always be the first place to check for internships. Speak with your advisor who can help guide you in the right direction about upcoming internships for college students and inform you which internship will satisfy certain required credits for your degree. Your school probably has a career service department with more of this information.
2. **Look for internships on company websites.** Is there a specific company that you've always wanted to work for? Make a list of the companies where you would like to intern, and then visit each company website. Look for a careers page on the website (sometimes at the bottom of the page) and see if there is a separate section for internships.
3. **Search online job boards for internships for college students.** There are tons of job boards out there- Monster, Glassdoor, Indeed, and CareerBuilder, among dozens of others. These aren't just websites for jobs, they're also a great resource for internships. Narrow down the search to include internships or add the word "internship" to any job search phrase that matches what you're looking for. There are several sites that are exclusively for finding internships and entry-

level listings: *Chegg.com*, *Collegerecruiter.com*, *GlobalExperiences.com*, *USAJobs.gov*.

4. **Use Google to find your college internship.** Googling "internships near me" may turn up quite a few options.
5. **Social media can be a good source.** LinkedIn is the top social media platform for professionals, ranging from college students to experienced executives. Plus, many companies use LinkedIn exclusively for job listings, and this also includes internships for students. Other social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are also good sources. Many businesses will use these accounts to announce job openings and information about upcoming internships.
6. **Ask your family and friends about internships for college students.** Networking doesn't just include connecting with professionals- it also means reaching out to your own personal network of friends and family. If a friend, parent, or other family member hears about an upcoming internship at the company they work for, they can keep you in the loop. If you apply, you'll likely have someone at the company willing to offer you a recommendation. These glowing recommendations go a long way. so don't underestimate the power of word of mouth.
7. **Attend those career fairs.** Many hiring managers will be impressed that you left campus (and your laptop) to find a college internship. Come prepared with your resume and to spend the day networking. You may want to practice talking to businesses you're less interested in first so you can feel confident before hitting up your dream companies.

Finding the right internship can be difficult at times but it is worth it. Don't give up! Happy hunting!