

Job or Internship? That is the Question

As the Career Center's associate director for experiential learning I have been very excited to see a marked increase in the number of internships posted for our students in Handshake. Frankly, at times it's been almost overwhelming to see so many opportunities — they seem to multiply overnight! On closer examination, however, I find that some — if not many — of the positions posted as “internships” really would be more aptly identified as “jobs,” and so I offer these refresher guidelines to help you differentiate a job from an internship.

- **Orientation/training** – While most jobs will require some orientation to company procedures and protocols, internships generally include more of a background to the company or industry and may require more incremental training as interns attain mastery of a skill and readiness to move to a next level.
- **Ongoing mentoring** – For many interns, this opportunity represents the introduction to a professional environment. Learning takes place on multiple levels: technical skills, soft skills, protocols, nuances of workplace culture and networking. These expectations are part of the intern's package but may not be expectations for a job.
- **Learning goals/objectives** – The primary outcome of the internship is the takeaway. The learning that the intern achieves is paramount to the internship process. Interns, especially those who are earning credit for the experience, establish learning goals and objectives at the outset of their experience. Many are required to maintain a journal or some form of ongoing reflection and/or write a final paper about their experience. They will be evaluated for a grade. Some may have to pass an internship course as a capstone or graduation requirement. Workers, on the other hand, have performance requirements and may face evaluations for a job, but likely it will not affect academic achievement.
- **Supervision** – A worker's supervisor may occupy a variety of positions on an organizational chart. That supervisor may or may not have expertise in the worker's career field but supervises the worker because of function or physical location in the office. An intern, however, must be supervised by someone with expertise in the student's field of study or career interest.
- **Environment** – Unless the internship is offered as a remote/virtual experience, the experience must be situated in a professional environment. Interns may not work in a business that is located in an individual's private residence.
- **Compensation** – Jobs are paid. Internships sometimes are unpaid.

Some important considerations about compensation and credit:

This is a tough issue, and it becomes tougher every day. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) outlines the circumstances under which an intern may be unpaid. Many for-profit employers will “offer” credit in lieu of compensation. There are problems with this approach. First, only faculty/academic departments may determine if a student may earn academic credit for an internship. Therefore, an employer may not “offer” credit; credit is not an employer's to offer. Second, credit is not compensation. Students must pay tuition and fees per credit hour for the credit that they earn. Requiring that students enroll for credit is to place a considerable financial burden on students while also potentially depriving them of hours during which they may be working and earning money elsewhere.

This becomes a barrier or disincentive to participating in internships for many students, allowing access to internships only to those who can afford not to work at other jobs. An equitable solution, then, is to offer compensation with your internship. You will increase the number, quality and diversity of applicants in your pool.

Back to the question – job or internship?

If you are posting a position that offers sound orientation along with ongoing mentoring by a supervisor in the student’s field of study and provides ample learning opportunities, you may have a great internship to offer! Be sure to include these elements in the position description. If you are interested in hiring a student to work independently after some initial orientation and minimal supervision, then you might consider posting your position as a part-time job. If you’re still not sure, contact Glenda Henkel, Associate Director for Experiential Learning, at 410-704-2932 or mhenkel@towson.edu.



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