



International Internship Program

INTERNATIONAL DIVISION

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

INTERNSHIP HOST HANDBOOK

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Thank you for working with the University of Wisconsin-Madison International Internship Program to host an intern. We work closely with internship hosts and students throughout the process before, during and after an international internship. This guide will get you started and be a resource throughout. Please never hesitate to reach out to us with questions or feedback.

PLANNING FOR YOUR INTERN

CREATING A POSITION DESCRIPTION

We will work closely with you as you develop your position description for your internship. It is important to first fill out the [IIP Employer Interest Survey](#), if you haven't already. This helps us make sure you are eligible to work with us and gives us an idea of what you have in mind. Then we will send you the Position Description Form. *It is important to fill out both forms, because the information is complementary.*

Filling out the Position Description Form:

- **This form is a first draft.** Answer the questions to the best of your ability, but don't worry if there is a question you don't understand or you want guidance on. We will review it after submission and refine each point with you.
- **Keep in mind the level of the student interns.** Most of the interns are in their early 20s and have not had extensive professional experience. However, many have some work or internship experience in addition to their academic preparation. Thus, it is important to think about the skills they may already have and what can be further developed in this internship opportunity through your organization's guidance. *Students should not be supervising anyone, replacing a regular employee, managing projects that are beyond their levels, or engaging in tasks that need certification they do not have.*
- **Make the position description appealing to students and useful to you.** Students have a lot of different options, so it is important to develop opportunities that would be of interest to them. Students want to gain professional experience and feel like the internship is a meaningful step toward their career. Asking for too many skills or high-level skills will be intimidating to students but leaving a description too general may not resonate with them. Think about your organization's needs and how a student fits into that to make something mutually beneficial.
- **Try to include specific and general tasks.** You should articulate a clear idea of what tasks you envision the student intern will work on. However, consider leaving some tasks more general or to be defined based on the skills, experience or interest of the students.
- **Don't host too many students at once.** We generally allow organizations the possibility of offering positions for between 1-4 students. Keep in mind that hosting an intern takes a lot of planning and work and you need to assess how much work there will be to do that is at their skill level. Having too many students and not enough tasks creates an unpleasant situation for everyone. Two can be a good number because it allows for the students to support each other throughout the experience and complete projects together.
- **Set clear expectations from the beginning.** The position description is the first glimpse into the position. We ask you questions about the work environment to help give students a clear idea of what the day-to-day internship will look like. Students often wonder about the office setting including their workspace and co-workers, housing, and transportation. *Setting realistic expectations from the beginning will help mitigate potential conflicts.*

- **Know what you can be flexible about and what things are necessities.** Are there aspects of the internship such as the dates that you can be flexible about? You can include that in the form. If there is a skill you absolutely need someone to possess, it's important to include that. One of the benefits of working with our office is that it allows you to be flexible with the internship which will increase the possibility of getting qualified applicants.
- **Virtual internships can be done with modifications.** It is possible to offer students a virtual or hybrid option, but important to remember that a virtual internship requires very clear expectations of tasks and check-in times as well as strategies for integrating the intern into the team from a distance. A virtual internship may be done by a student who is on campus in Madison or could be a student who is living locally for study abroad or another reason who may be able to do a hybrid position with some in-person meetings. These generally take place during our semesters when fewer students travel for internships.

Once we have discussed the Position Description Form, we will put the information into our database where students will be able to search for the internship. *Before sharing it with students, we will send it to you for final approval.*

INTERN SUPPORT

We understand that you may not be able to compensate the students for their work and it is not a requirement to be able to host an intern as local laws and organization capacity vary greatly. However, even if you can't provide a stipend, anything you can offer such as housing, meals, transportation, free language courses or an excursion may make your internship position more appealing. You will get a larger and more diverse pool of candidates if you are able to offer something to your interns to show your appreciation for their work. Our most competitive internships are often those that offer the most support.

Although we do offer students scholarship opportunities through our office and campus, many students are on a budget and giving up a higher paid opportunity to intern abroad so anything that offsets the cost helps. We can help give you ideas of support options.

ROLE OF SUPERVISOR

The intern's responsibilities and tasks should be clearly defined and articulated. It is important that the supervisor introduce the student to the work environment and anyone they will be working with in the first few days of work. By the end of the first week, the intern should have a meeting with their supervisor to go through their tasks and expectations and how to communicate. To provide structure to the internship, it is important to think about what the intern will be doing on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. However, it is also important to leave room for flexibility, so that the internship has room to build on the student's strengths and interests as well as the organization's needs.

Additionally, outlining clear expectations and establishing a consistent method of providing feedback will help ensure the intern's sustained development in their role. Supervision should ensure that the internship is mutually beneficial to the organization and intern. If expectations are not met and the intern is not developing as anticipated, IIP would appreciate the organization sharing any concerns to see if we may assist in addressing any issues and offer support. The supervisor will be asked to more formally evaluate the intern's performance following the internship's completion via an online survey.

For a virtual internship, the supervisor role is essential in setting expectations of schedule, communication, organization culture, and connections with the team.

ROLE OF EMERGENCY CONTACT

We require an English-speaking emergency contact for each in-person internship site. This can be the supervisor, or an alternate contact who will be in regular contact with the student and in the country during the internship period. This person must provide a phone number where they can be reached at any time, as well as an email address. We very rarely need to use the emergency contact, but it is essential we have someone listed in case we are unable to reach the student or need other support locally in an emergency.

Examples when needing to use an emergency contact include inability to reach the student or a medical emergency or accident requiring care. We have a rotation of professional study abroad staff with a 24/7 emergency phone number who can be reached by the student or on-site contacts to help navigate any situation in the moment and we follow up with next steps. We work with insurance, families and the student to navigate any emergency situations and the emergency contact is our resource on the ground if needed.

If the emergency contact will be away from the site or out of the country please inform us and provide a backup contact person for that time. If you know in advance of these dates let us know as part of the confirmation so we can document that.

Emergency contacts are not necessary for virtual internship placements.

SELECTING AN INTERN

IIP will post the internship position and students will apply directly through our database. The application process is conducted through IIP; we assist students with all questions regarding the application process and after the application deadline, we will review all applications to make sure they're complete. We will then provide you with log-in information to view all the applications, including each student's information, resume, cover letter and any other application materials you requested.

You'll review the applications and decide which students you'd like to interview, if that's part of your review and selection process. You can contact the students directly to set up interviews, or we can arrange the interviews for you, given your availability and your list of selected students. Keep in mind the time difference between Wisconsin and your location when setting up interview times. More information will be provided to you by email.

After conducting interviews, you'll select the student(s) you'd like to offer the internship to. We recommend also selecting one or two alternates, in case your first choice does not accept the offer. We can work with you on the offer process that works best for you. Keep in mind that generally we like to make sure students have a week or two to consider the offer before making a decision. This also gives us time to meet with students before they accept to ensure that their questions are all answered and that they have appropriate expectations. It is a good idea to wait until the student(s) have accepted the offer(s) before letting the other applicants know that they did not get the position, unless you are sure that you would not offer the position to that applicant.

When a student decides to accept or decline an internship offer, they will need to do so in our database, as well as emailing you to let you know. At that point, you can begin communicating with the intern about any necessary pre-departure information and logistics. We ask that you finalize start and end dates as soon as possible, as this is required for enrollment in IIP's programs as well as for immigration paperwork. Please provide the student (and IIP) with an offer letter detailing the terms of the internship including the start and end dates, tasks and expectations, supervisor assignment, and any other details regarding remuneration or support. We can provide you with a sample offer letter.

IMMIGRATION/OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

Different countries require different visas, work permits, or documentation for interns. IIP supports the student in identifying this information and obtaining the documentation. If you can provide help and guidance to the student - especially if you've been through the process before or know about your country's requirements - that makes the process easier as well. Obtaining the correct documentation can take many weeks or months, and we encourage hosts and students to begin working on this right away.

Some countries, such as Italy and France, require an internship agreement signed by the host company, the intern, and their home university. If one is required for your intern, please provide the agreement in both the host country's language and in English. IIP will need to have this document reviewed by the UW-Madison legal department before we are able to sign it, so the earlier this can be provided, the better.

Some countries may also require the student to register with the local government upon arrival. This may depend on the length of the student's stay or their specific location. Please share these details with the student if applicable.

What IIP can help with:

1. Coordinating signing of official internship agreements (required for some countries) to certify student participation in a course for credit.
2. General advice and assistance on resources for visas and troubleshooting questions.

It is ultimately the student's responsibility to complete all requirements. ***IIP and UW-Madison are not responsible for obtaining visas for students, nor are they in any way responsible for visa or entry denial.***

PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERN

Students often ask us what they can do to get ready for their internship and will welcome communication from you. While not a requirement, we encourage you to begin communicating with students about the internship before they arrive. Establish the most effective communication platform (email, WhatsApp, Skype, Teams, etc.) to stay in close contact and share materials or answer questions as needed. While IIP provides a pre-departure orientation, anything specific to the internship will come from you. This might include photos of the office, an organization chart or list of people that interns will be working closely with, a city guide, first week work schedule, etc. We also try to connect interns with the previous year's interns for continuing positions.

You may provide the intern with any pre-departure materials so they are prepared to begin the internship. This could be your first experience hosting an intern or you may already have an intern guide in place. If you have advice for how students can prepare for the internship please share that with them as well. For example, two of our internships require that students complete required reading before they arrive to have a better idea of the country or organization. If you have an onboarding or orientation schedule, you could also share that.

Important questions to answer before arrival include:

- Dress code for the office and any other events
- Anticipated hours and schedule
- How to get to the office
- Any advice on getting from the airport to housing, if not straightforward
- Sharing best contact information for once they arrive
- First day expectations
- Any useful pre-reading or preparation for the organization, project, or country

THE INTERNSHIP

ONBOARDING

The first day is important. Remember that the intern has never been to your office before. Make sure that they have clear instructions on how to reach your workplace and when to arrive.

It's a great idea to start out with some kind of orientation. This could include:

- a tour of the office or workspace
- introductions to the team
- reviewing details such as work hours, dress code, and any important office regulations or policies. It can also be helpful to mention office norms around breaks - when are typical break times during the day? Is lunch taken at work or away from the office?

You'll want to make sure you have some time to sit down with your intern and talk about their role. It can be helpful to start with an explanation of your organization's mission or work, and some information about the structure of the office, such as the responsibilities of different team members or departments. You'll also want to review the intern's tasks or responsibilities for the duration of the internship. It can be helpful to discuss how those responsibilities fit into the larger picture of the organization so the intern understands the impact they can have.

Finally, make sure your intern knows how to communicate with you. For example, can they stop by your desk anytime they have a question, or will you be checking in on them every day at a specific time to answer questions? Is it okay for the student to send you questions via text if you are not in the office? When will you have more structured or formal check-ins?

An internship is a learning experience, so keep in mind that the intern will need to be trained and taught. Tasks or words that might seem common-sense or familiar to you might be completely new to the intern. Assume that everything will need to be explained clearly and thoroughly, and give

instructions on timelines and how to complete each project. If there are certain team members or employees who can assist with specific tasks, make sure the intern has been introduced to them and knows what areas they can help with.

CHECK-INS & FEEDBACK

Providing feedback helps ensure the intern's continuous development. Feedback can be verbal, written, or a combination of both. It may be a two-way conversation or more one-sided. You may have a feedback style that works best for you; it may also be beneficial to confer with the intern what form of feedback is most effective so they are able to learn and grow in the role.

Keep in mind that there can be cultural differences in how feedback is given and received. Having a discussion about different cultural norms and approaches to feedback with the intern may be beneficial. Specific, timely feedback is often most constructive and interns typically want honest feedback to help them improve but also don't want to feel attacked with critical, negative comments. Consider establishing a specific time every week or month to provide feedback and engage in dialogue. Encouraging and maintaining an open dialogue with the intern can assist their progress and help avoid misunderstandings.

For a virtual intern who may have fewer opportunities to seek and get feedback in the moment, think about setting expectations and creating a process for giving feedback that works for both of you.

INTEGRATING TO ORGANIZATION CULTURE

This internship may be the student's first time working full-time or close to full-time in an organization, and they will be doing it in a new country and culture on top of that! They may need guidance and support in how to understand the organization and build relationships.

As noted above, introduce the intern to the full team so they can learn roles, names, and who to go for for what, even if just to network and build their knowledge of the organization. Build opportunities for them to join meetings and introduce themselves and what they are working on.

You may find value in assigning an additional mentor in addition to the supervisor to expand their network and spread out their questions about the work culture, expectations, local resources, etc. Many interns have shared with us the value of having a cultural mentor, often someone closer to them in age, to go to with organizational and cultural questions they may not want to bother their supervisor with.

Though it is more challenging, this integration can also be achieved for virtual interns through assigning mentors beyond the supervisor, inviting them to any social virtual opportunities, including them in meetings and more.

COMMON CHALLENGES WITH INTERN/SUPERVISOR

It is very common for challenges to arise between an intern and a supervisor. It is important to try to catch and address these challenges as soon as possible

Here are some of the most common issues that arise:

- **Unclear expectations:** It is important to try to set realistic expectations for students as soon as possible, starting in the position description and the interview. Even things that may seem obvious to you should be said out loud to the student because it may not be obvious to them.

Remember that this may be one of their first professional experiences and in a culture they aren't familiar with.

- **Lack of training or orientation:** Students often complain that they aren't sure what they should be working on. This can be easily solved by having an onboarding process to introduce them to the workplace and train on tasks they will be working on. Many students want to take initiative, but cannot do so until they have been trained. *Training can be time-intensive but it pays off because students can be more productive throughout the internship.*
- **Cultural Misunderstandings:** One of the challenges of international exchange is not knowing when a conflict is interpersonal or cultural differences. We do a pre-departure orientation with students to help them reflect on the cultural differences, but supervisors should be aware of it as well.
- **Feedback:** Students who go to university in the U.S. are accustomed to a lot of feedback, good and bad. In the U.S., students are used to receiving constructive criticism which is to say something they are doing well followed by something they can improve. We often hear students say they are not sure if they are doing well in their internships because they are only hearing the negative feedback. *You might consider scheduling times weekly or monthly meetings so you have a planned time to give feedback.*
- **Language Barriers:** One of the biggest challenges for interns is the language barrier. Even if the internship is in English they may not be used to speaking in different dialects or speaking with non-native English speakers. There is usually a learning period at the beginning of the internship, so *we recommend being patient with the student as they get used to the new language or dialect.*
- **Virtual Internships:** Virtual internships have inherent challenges because the intern and the supervisor are not seeing each other in person and are therefore missing out on important social cues such as body language. It is important that a virtual internship provides added guidance to interns and frequent check-ins so that the student feels comfortable asking questions or for help. *Supervisors can still act as mentors virtually and provide structure for a fruitful internship.*

IIP is here to support you through any conflict that may arise with the student. We will speak with you confidentially if you are having an issue with your intern to give you advice about how to manage the situation or help you understand what might be occurring. You should feel free to try to manage conflicts with the student on your own, but if you ever need support, please let us know.

INTERNSHIP COURSE

Students participating in in-person internships cultivated by IIP enroll in our Worldwide Internship Program 3-credit online course. This course allows students to earn 3 credits while they complete an internship outside the United States that is a minimum of 100 hours of work over at least 4 weeks, though most students complete much more. The course focuses on the global workplace and understanding culture and its role at work. Each week students reflect on their week at the internship, read and respond to readings about culture, and interact with their peers interning around the world. Some assignments include reflection on a meeting with their supervisor, an informational interview, and a final reflection paper.

Students do not need to be given time at their internship to do this complementary academic work, but it does take up time in their weeks and if the internship site and their workloads allow, some students

have found it helpful to do some work during downtimes at the internship. Regardless, we want all internship hosts to be aware of this integral part of the program so they can support their intern's success and make space for the intern to explore these topics of working cross-culturally and reflect on challenges and accomplishments during their internship.

Students completing a virtual internship are strongly encouraged to seek credit opportunities to provide structure and reflection as well and IIP staff can advise them.

EMERGENCIES

At our pre-departure orientation, we guide students on what to do in case of an emergency. All IIP interns are covered under [CISI Travel and Health Insurance](#) which covers them in case of a medical emergency or even in the case of needing to evacuate for a natural disaster, political or military event (Note: the insurance does not include pandemic coverage).

UW-Madison has a 24/7 emergency phone that students can call in urgent situations; a professional will pick up and guide them. During normal business hours, 8am-4pm Central Time, IIP advisors are also available via phone or email to help students. We require that each internship has an English-speaking emergency contact and we ask that this person keeps us updated with the situation as we work to resolve it.

Internship hosts and students should never hesitate to contact IIP staff with concerns big or small - whether a doctor's visit, accident, mental health concerns, or local or national events in the host country.

EARLY TERMINATION

There may be certain circumstances - personal or professional, local or global - that result in ending the internship early. For instance, the intern might have a health problem or a family emergency that means they need to return home, or the intern is not the right fit for the internship. Either way, communication is the key to making sure the internship is concluded as smoothly as possible.

If the intern needs to end the internship early:

- Make sure you understand when the intern's last day will be. Let IIP know that the intern informed you they'll be concluding their internship early.
- If you would be interested in having the student wrap up their tasks remotely, you are welcome to discuss this with them. It may or may not be possible, but is an option that can be explored. This has proven successful and led to smooth and beneficial conclusion of the internship for interns and hosts in the past.

If you are thinking about ending the internship early:

- Refer to the section on "Common Challenges with Intern/Supervisor" to understand how IIP can help manage challenges or conflicts
- If there is a conflict that is serious enough that you are considering ending the internship early, please contact IIP before telling the student. We can talk through options based on the situation, and help figure out the best path forward for both you and the intern.
- Keep in mind that students are required to complete at least 100 hours and 4 weeks at their internship in order to receive credit for it.

In both situations:

- Work with the intern to create a wrap-up plan: do they need to document what they've completed, or where they're at in a bigger project? Do certain materials need to be passed along to someone else at the organization?
- Have a final meeting with the intern to discuss their time with your organization. Provide feedback on areas in which they've done well as well as possible future areas for improvement. Ask them questions about their experience and what they've learned.

EXTENSION

If the internship is going particularly well, the student might ask if they can extend their internship with you - or you might want to offer them that opportunity. As long as this won't cause any problems with visas or work permits, and it doesn't interfere with any other planned internships, IIP is generally supportive.

However, we do ask that you inform us of this right away, so that we can update their insurance coverage and other records. It's also possible to extend the internship virtually, with the student continuing their internship remotely once they've returned home. We would like to be informed of a virtual extension as well, to be aware of that possibility and the intern's continued engagement.

AFTER THE INTERNSHIP

After the internship ends we hope that you will continue to stay engaged with the student and IIP!

FEEDBACK

You may consider conducting an exit interview to gain the student's feedback on the internship, the organization, and more. It could be an opportunity to discuss what they believed went well and perhaps could have been improved as well as their overall satisfaction with the experience.

The student may request to use you as a reference on future job applications or have you craft a letter of recommendation. Keep in mind that students have limited professional experiences and your reference may be key for their ability to access future professional or academic opportunities. Of course, you can decline if you are not comfortable offering a strong reference based on the student's performance during the internship.

Following the internship's completion, IIP will ask for your feedback to gain an assessment of the intern's overall job performance, whether they met the established goals, and demonstrated continued progress. This evaluation helps us track our students' achievement and gain valuable feedback as we work with you and other hosts in the future.

HOSTING AGAIN

After you've hosted your first UW intern, we can discuss if it has been a good fit and if you would like to host again. After learning what aspects of the internship work well and what improvements need to be made, we can discuss changes to the position to make it better with each iteration. It is much easier to

post subsequent internships because we already have all of your information and we only need to make updates. We also seek feedback from participants on areas that need review or changes or how to better communicate to future potential interns.

We get in touch in August to see if you would like to host a student in spring (January-May) and in December to see if you would like to host in summer (May-August) or fall (September-December).