

Student Guide to Academic Internships

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General Policies and Guidelines*

*"Let me read with open eyes the book my days are writing and learn."
Dag Hammarskjold*

Overview

Academic internships are offered by a number of departments and programs at Southwestern. These programs allow students to acquire new knowledge and to integrate that knowledge with concepts that have been learned through more traditional academic programs. Internships for credit require significant academic work beyond on-site hours, such as keeping a journal, writing, research, classroom meetings and presentations. This academic component, supervised by a faculty member, is part of what distinguishes academic internships from part-time or full-time employment, volunteer work, or non-credit internships.

Credit Hours

Internships during the regular academic year usually follow the academic calendar and average 10 to 15 weeks in length for a three hours of credit. The length of summer internships varies but is normally at least six weeks.

Credit hours for the academic internship may be counted toward the student's major or minor. Each department or program decides the amount of credit to be awarded and usually uses course numbers 941, 942, or 943 to designate an academic internship. Most departments will limit a student to a total of three hours of course credit for academic internships. Academic internships are restricted to a maximum of three credit hours during the regular semester and to a maximum of six credit hours during the summer. Summer internships for more than three credit hours must be approved in writing by the faculty supervisor and department chair.

A student receiving three hours credit must work a minimum of 120 site hours during the academic term. This requirement does not include transportation to and from the internship site, nor does it include time spent satisfying academic requirements such as keeping a journal, writing, research, class meetings, presentations, etc. Academic internships for other than three hours credit should abide by the formula of approximately 40 on-site hours per hour of academic credit granted. The student would still be expected to spread these hours over at least 10 weeks during the regular semester or six weeks in the summer.

*Please note that these policies and guidelines apply to all Academic Internships. However, individual departments and programs may have requirements, policies, or guidelines that are more specific or rigorous than what is described here.

Supervision of the Internship

There shall be appropriate supervision of the student by an SU faculty member (or other such professional in the case of non-SU sponsored internship programs) to ensure the academic integrity of the credit. The faculty supervisor is required to communicate with the site supervisor at least three times during the course of the internship. One of these communications should occur prior to the start of the internship, one should occur approximately at the mid-point of the internship, and one at or near the conclusion. These communications can be carried out in person, by phone, mail, or electronically, at the discretion of the faculty supervisor. Faculty supervisors are strongly encouraged to keep a written record of such communications; evaluation forms to facilitate follow-up are available from the Internship Coordinator.

Monetary Compensation

Monetary compensation for expenses and/or work performed during an academic internship is allowed at the discretion of the department and the institution sponsoring the academic internship. Once an agreement has been reached, students may not negotiate for a change in monetary compensation. Students are not allowed to receive monetary compensation for an on-campus academic internship.

Grading Policy

Academic internships normally are graded on a Pass/D/Fail basis. Under extenuating circumstances, such as when an internship fulfills a capstone requirement or other unique departmental requirements, a letter grade may be authorized. Such requests must be approved in advance in writing by the faculty supervisor and department chair.

On-campus Academic Internships

There are a limited number of opportunities for academic internships at Southwestern, including internships in institutional research, athletics, and the fine arts. On-campus internships are eligible for academic credit, provided that they offer significant field or on-the-job experience, that the faculty supervisor and site supervisor are different individuals, and the student receives no monetary compensation.

Internships through Exchange Programs

Academic internships may also be offered as part of international or domestic exchange programs with other universities. In certain cases, such as the SU programs in London or New York, credit will be given directly by SU. If a student participates in a program that is not sponsored or affiliated with SU directly, an internship would usually be treated as transfer credit. Students are responsible for discussing the feasibility of such internships with persons in the appropriate offices at SU, such as the Office of International Programs and the Registrar's office.

Student Eligibility

The individual department or program determines eligibility for participation in an academic internship. Generally, a student's academic record, level of maturity, and prior employment or service experiences will be considered. Since academic internship credits are upper-division hours, a student normally will have successfully completed introductory courses, and preferably intermediate courses, in the field in which the internship is to be taken. Further, if a student has completed an academic internship, priority will generally be given to other students in the department who have not had that opportunity. Some internships may be competitive, and it is up to the department and/or the sponsoring organization to determine the criteria about how such internships will be awarded.

Individual departments or programs may also have application deadlines or requirements that differ from the general University requirements.

Additional Policies for Summer Internships

Summer internships require more advance planning on the part of students since both students and faculty members are more likely to be away from the campus for extended periods of time during the summer. Since internships require a faculty supervisor, a student who is interested in a summer internship should discuss his or her interest with the Internship Coordinator and appropriate faculty member prior to pre-registration for the Summer terms. If the approval of the faculty member and the student's academic advisor are received, the student may pre-register for the internship.

THE LAST DAY TO ADD A SUMMER INTERNSHIP IS THE LAST CLASS DAY OF THE SPRING SEMESTER. Students should register for the Summer III (non-residential) term for all internships. Tuition and fees for summer internships will be calculated in the same manner as for all other summer courses offered by SU.

Since it may be difficult or impossible for students enrolled in summer internships to meet regularly as part of a class or even individually with their professors, some departments or individual faculty members may choose not to supervise internships during the summer. The primary concern would be that it would be difficult to maintain the same academic standards during the summer as during the regular academic terms since the student would not necessarily have access to an academic library, classroom meetings with other students, etc. Some departments may allow summer internships but have different academic requirements—such as the number of on-site hours. It is the responsibility of students to thoroughly investigate their departments' expectations and policies for the Summer term.

What an Academic Internship IS

- **A Customized Learning Opportunity**
Take charge of what you want to learn by working with your faculty advisor to design your own curriculum. This is your chance to translate theory into practice. Decide what you want to learn, then plan how you will learn and evaluate your experience.
- **An Opportunity for Valuable Supervision**
Liaison and supervision by a faculty member and by a primary supervisor at the work site ensures coordination between the academic program and the work experience. These individuals provide support and feedback to guide you in achieving your learning goals.
- **Career Exploration**
This is your chance for a “real-world” experience that allows you to explore and evaluate a career field. You may even identify desirable related types of work that you previously had not considered.
- **Professional Growth**
You will have the opportunity to see professionals in action as you attend meetings and assist with responsibilities and projects. Observing management style and company culture will enrich your understanding of the workplace. Some organizations provide interns interaction with upper-management, “brown-bag” lunch seminars, and include them in social gatherings such as picnics, movie nights, etc.
- **Results Oriented**
Learning outcomes are solidified through evaluations of the overall experience. Closure is achieved through recognition of intern contributions. This process can assist you in articulating your accomplishments and identifying new goals.
- **Valuable Work Experience**
Internships are designed to provide substantive and challenging work experiences that strengthen your resume and make you more competitive for full-time positions. You can expand your network of contacts, acquire references, and perhaps even gain a mentor.
- **Training and Skill Development**
In addition to training for specific job duties, other valuable skills such as writing, research, computer expertise, and communication are often enhanced through the internship experience. Exposure to “cutting-edge” techniques and new developments in the field are also possible.

What an Academic Internship is NOT

- **Easy Credit**

Academic internships are not "easy," because they can carry as much or more work and stress as a class. However, the nature of the work is very different and can be a refreshing change from the campus routine.

- **Credit for Your Part-Time Job**

This is not the chance to get academic credit for a summer or part-time job. The primary objective is not to earn money, but to learn something new and to integrate the new knowledge and skills with your prior academic coursework. While a student may take the initiative in finding an academic internship, the supervising faculty member has the final decision as to whether a particular position is appropriate for academic credit.

- **Credit for Repeated Work Experience**

Academic internships are NEW, learning experiences that allow students to learn new responsibilities, tasks, skills, stretch, grow, and develop skills. Few exceptions are made to this requirement.

- **Volunteer Work**

An intern is not the same as a volunteer. As an intern, you earn credit from an academic department, and are evaluated by your site supervisor and faculty supervisor. A volunteer may perform the same tasks equally well but may or may not be self-conscious about the learning derived. As an intern, however, you must be aware of what you are learning and strive to meet identified learning objectives. Your supervisor at the internship site must also make a more extensive commitment for helping you have a quality experience.

- **A "Go-Fer" Position**

An intern is not supposed to perform all the routine or uninteresting work within an organization. An academic internship is meaningful when it involves entry-level pre-professional tasks. Most positions involve a certain, inevitable amount of clerical work, but this should not represent the preponderance of your duties.

- **Guarantee of a Job**

Academic internships increase your chances of being offered a full-time job, but you cannot count on the internship organization to be your next employer. The best way to gain career and job advantages is to get to know the people in the internship organization. Build an information and referral network for yourself from these contacts.

Finding an Academic Internship

Step 1: Read this guide carefully.

Step 2: Go to Career Services. Prepare a resume, attend workshops, and explore information on careers, jobs and internships.

Step 3: Find out whether your department or academic program has additional materials or requirements for academic internships. Check the SU Catalog and the Academic Advising Handbook. Ask your academic advisor if he or she is aware of additional materials or requirements. If you are applying for an international or other off-campus academic program, find out whether internships are an option.

Step 4: Give serious thought as to whether you are ready for an academic internship. Do you have the appropriate academic prerequisites? Do you have reliable transportation? Will your course schedule allow blocks of several hours at least two days a week? Have you had any employment or service experiences that would make you a serious candidate for a competitive internship? Are you mature enough to represent the University in a professional manner?

If you have done all of the above and believe you are ready...

Step 5: Schedule an appointment with the Internship Coordinator in Career Services. If she believes you are ready, go to Step 6.

Step 6: Make an appointment with the faculty member(s) responsible for supervising internships in your department. Bring your resume and some ideas about the type of internship you might be interested in. Be sure to do this well before pre-registration for the semester or summer term in which you are interested.

Your faculty supervisor is not responsible for finding an internship for you—however, there is a good chance that he or she will have some ideas, as will Career Services.

Do NOT independently set up an interview with an organization or employer about doing an academic internship without getting prior approval from your faculty supervisor or Career Services.

Step 7: Interview for potential internships, always coordinating your appointments and efforts with your faculty supervisor and Career Services.

Step 8: Be sure to complete all of the necessary materials to meet the deadlines for registration. In particular, be aware of the dates for pre-registration and the last day to add internships. Be sure to complete the “Student Internship Agreement and Release” and the “Internship Learning Contract.” Both must be turned in to the Registrar's office. The student, the faculty supervisor, the site supervisor and Career Services, should also keep copies of these forms.

Terms & Definitions

- Internship Site:** The organization/company offering an academic internship.
- Site Supervisor:** The person at the internship site immediately responsible for the intern and his/her performance. The person to whom the intern reports on a regular basis and whom completes the student's performance evaluations.
- Faculty Supervisor:** The faculty member responsible for evaluating academic assignments and granting academic credit. Your faculty supervisor is typically selected from your major department. NOTE: Your faculty supervisor is not necessarily the same person as your academic advisor.
- Internship Coordinator:** Maria Kruger
Career Services
McCook-Crain Building
512-863-1346