What Employers Need to Know When Offering Virtual Internships

The University of Rhode Island has resources and staff available to help you with developing experiential programs, writing internship descriptions, and posting on Handshake. We are here for you in each stage of the process.

A Closer Look at Internships:

An internship is any carefully monitored meaningful learning experience in which an individual has intentional professional goals and reflects actively on what they are accomplishing throughout the experience. Developing an internship program is an excellent strategy for investing in your organization’s future successes, often leading to discovering future talent.

- Internships can be completed for academic credit, or can be non-credit bearing
- Internships can be paid or unpaid, depending upon the industry standard. Paid internships are more highly sought-after by students, as many must also earn an income during the time they are not in classes.
- Upon selecting a student for an internship position it is the responsibility of the student to discuss any academic credit hours requirements and details, along with necessary paperwork for internship supervisors.
- The Employer Guide to Creating a Meaningful Learning Experience for Students is a resource that provides information on how to develop an internship program and includes several sample descriptions.

Designing Your Virtual Internship Program:

Prior to hiring an intern, an employer must understand how the company’s goals and culture will align with the intern’s learning goals. It is also vital to consider if the intern will be a strong fit for a remote work environment and have the training and tools to succeed.
Logistics to consider for a virtual internship:

- Clearly delineate what your organization hopes to gain from the internship.
  - Is your organization looking to fulfill a need on a specific meaningful project or will the internship entail a variety of small meaningful projects?
  - What is the timeframe for completion and how many hours per week will this require of the intern?
- Specify which talents, academic background, and experience an ideal internship candidate would possess.
  - Discuss the interns capacity for working remotely, and their confidence in managing self and time while committed to your organization.
- Determine who will be primarily responsible for the intern(s) and how they will communicate with the intern remotely.
  - When will regular check in’s occur?
  - How will performance feedback be delivered?

Preparing to supervise an intern remotely:

- Create a training program that can be delivered online so the student has a strong foundation right from the start.
- Select and test the technology that will be ideal for the intern in accomplishing the assignments associated with the internship. (free of charge to the student).
- Clearly define expectations and assignment deadlines at the start of the internship.
- All tasks and projects should be carefully prepared and planned in order for the intern to manage the work effectively and independently.
  - All materials, instructions, and task descriptions need to be well prepared and available online so interns have access to that information when it is needed.
- Supervisors and staff members need to be committed and available to engage with interns on a consistent basis virtually.
Shifting In-Person Internships to Virtual Internships:

In the wake of the current COVID-19 pandemic we have seen a necessary shift to working remotely for both employees and interns. It is important to consider the following questions as you migrate to a virtual internship position.

- Will the student be able to fulfill their responsibilities from a remote location?
- If not, what alternatives or project work might you assign instead?
- What technologies would be required to maintain regular communication with a remote intern? Telephone? Email? Video communication?
- Does your intern have access to these technologies?
- Will you provide the intern with the necessary resources to perform the role?
- What system do you have, or can you create, to keep track of student hours and projects? Now that many organizations are allowing employees to work remotely, remember that an intern can use the same process.
- What communication schedule can you develop to ensure that you and your intern have access to each other in lieu of face to face meetings?

Remote Internships are Successful When:

- Internship sites and students agree on detailed project descriptions including an outline of tasks, expectations, and timelines for completion.
- The internship site uses a virtual project management tool for communication and shared progress reports.
- Site sponsors create a system to track hours worked (i.e. Google Drive).
- Regular virtual communication is scheduled for reporting, progress, and feedback. Student interns are most successful when they have a regular schedule for checking in and clear expectations.

Resources for delivering a virtual internship experience:

- Face to Face Communication – GoToMeeting, Zoom, FaceTime, WebEx, Zoho Meetings, etc.
- Other communication tools – Slack, Email, Instant Messenger, etc.
- Free Project Management Tools – Asana, OpenProject, nTask, Monday
- Online file sharing – DropBox, Box, GoFile, etc
Posting on Handshake:

- Visit [http://uri.joinhandshake.com](http://uri.joinhandshake.com) to set up an employer profile in Handshake, our online portal for job, internship, and volunteer opportunities.
  - Be sure to check the "Allow remote workers" box for virtual internships
- Postings are vetted by our Employer Relations team.
- Once the internship is approved (within 2 business days) you will be able to “post a job” from your dashboard.
- For questions with the Handshake program please visit [https://support.joinhandshake.com/](https://support.joinhandshake.com/) or email hvhernandez@uri.edu
- A full Menu of Engagement Opportunities is available to all employer partners on our Center for Career and Experiential Education website [here](http://uri.joinhandshake.com).

What Happens After You Post an Internship:

- Your posting comes directly to the Office of Employer Relations to be reviewed, shared, and posted in Handshake.
- If you feel that your opportunity is not attracting the applicant pool you are hoping for please contact our Office of Employer Relations (see contacts below)
  - At times we can support by reviewing key search terms, adding filters, and corresponding directly with department liaisons across campus to promote your opportunity.
- Handshake will notify you when you have applications to review.
- Schedule interviews for your candidates in person, or virtually through any platform available to you.

Employer Relations Team at URI:

We have a team of experts here to assist you at any point in your development or posting of an internship. Please reach out to us at any time for support:

- **URI Center for Career and Experiential Education**
  - Holly Hernandez, Assistant Director of Employer Relations
  - hvhernandez@uri.edu
- **URI College of Business**
  - Jessica Linicus, Employer Relations
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- **URI College of Engineering**
  - Tamura Leso, Coordinator of Academic Affairs
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Thank You!