

Hosting a GCU Intern: A Step-by-Step Guide

Everything You Need to Know to Provide a Professional and Purposeful Internship Experience



GCU
CAREER SERVICES



Foreword: Your Playbook for Internship Success

THIS MANUAL IS YOUR STRATEGIC PLAYBOOK for building a winning internship program. Whether you’re scouting fresh talent, developing future all-stars or strengthening your bench, experiential learning opportunities may give your organization a competitive edge. From volunteers to interns and apprentices, there’s a perfect lineup to match your organization’s goals.

AT GRAND CANYON UNIVERSITY (GCU), we believe that hands-on experience is the ultimate game-changer, helping students bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical execution. Just like in sports, success in business comes down to having the right game plan.

BY STEPPING ONTO THE FIELD WITH GCU STUDENTS, you’re not just offering them experience — you’re shaping the future of your industry while gaining innovative perspectives and eager talent ready to make an impact.

SO, LACE UP AND GET READY TO PLAY. Whether you’re designing your first internship or fine-tuning your program, this guide can help you draft a game plan, execute winning strategies and create opportunities that lead to victory for both your organization and the students you mentor. Let’s build champions together. Lopes Up!

How Employers Can Benefit From Internship Programs

Offering internships is a strategic investment in your organization’s future. By mentoring GCU interns, employers can gain:

- **A Pipeline of Future Talent:** Many interns transition into full-time hires, reducing recruitment costs
- **Increased Retention Rates:** Interns who become employees require less onboarding
- **Fresh Ideas and Perspectives:** Students bring the latest knowledge, tools and techniques from the classroom
- **Community Engagement and Brand Visibility:** Internship programs can strengthen your presence on campus and in the community
- **Enhanced Workforce Development:** Investing in students today creates a stronger industry tomorrow

What Defines a Strong Internship?

- Clearly defined learning objectives guided by an experienced professional
- A focus on academic, career and personal development
- A blend of observation, hands-on experience, reflection and evaluation
- A structure that meets both the intern’s goals and the organization’s needs
- A typical duration of three months, either part-time or 1 – 2 semesters
- Opportunities for both technical and soft skill development
- A safe, professional environment with the necessary tools to support learning

Choosing the Right Experiential Learning Opportunity for Your Organization

Internships are one of many experiential learning opportunities that can bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and practical application. The following matrix highlights some of the major program types that may fit well with your company’s organizational structure.

Experiential Learning Program Matrix

Experiential Learning Type	Key Features	General Length of Time	Potential Employer Benefits
Apprenticeships	Combined hands-on training with classroom instruction; trade-focused	1 – 5 years (depending on trade)	- Builds skilled workforce - Reduces turnover - Provides trade-specific training
Capstone	In-depth design-based project; often a final demonstration of knowledge within a particular subject area	Typically, 1 to 2 semesters (may include remote capstone)	- Provides innovative solutions - Influences future talent - Increases company visibility on campus - Serves as hands-on evaluation of potential employees
Civic Engagement	Involves advocacy, volunteerism, political participation; develops civic awareness and leadership	Varies (short-term events to long-term involvement)	- Improves public image - Stakeholder partnerships - Develops socially conscious leaders - Hands-on evaluation of potential employees
Co-Ops	Paid, full/part-time work; alternates with school semesters; tied to academic credit	1 semester long (usually 3 – 4 months)	- Fosters long-term talent fit - Fosters skills development - Helps students grow into higher roles - Serves as hands-on evaluation of potential employees
Employment	Paid work; may not be related to academics; includes part- or full-time work	Varies (part-time/full-time, long-term)	- Supports workforce development - Leads to high retention - Supports operations
Externships (Job Shadowing)	Observational work, typically short-term; increases student exposure to organizations	A few days to a few weeks	- Potential for low-cost recruiting - Cultivates a talent pipeline - Facilitates student exposure
Internships	Structured, supervised practical experience; may be paid/unpaid and for credit	A few weeks to a few months; or 1 – 2 semesters	- Offers fresh perspectives - Potential for cost-effective recruiting - Serves as hands-on evaluation of potential employees
Project-Based Learning	Collaborative team-based projects tied to practical problems. Project completion sometimes relies upon the pulling together of multiple subjects, such as math, science and humanities	Varies by complexity, from a few days to a full semester	- Brings new ideas/solutions - Raises brand awareness - Fosters professional development - Serves as hands-on evaluation of potential employees
Canyon Emerging Scholars	Faculty-led, multi-disciplinary research projects with potential for publication	Typically, 1 to 2 semesters	- Potential opportunity for low-cost research - Raises brand awareness - Cultivates a talent pipeline - Serves as hands-on evaluation of potential employees
Service Learning	Integrated into coursework; applies classroom theory to overcome challenges; combines service with learning objective	1 semester long (typically, 4 months)	- Addresses community needs - Fosters academic partnerships - New problem-solving ideas - Hands-on evaluation of potential employees
Strategic Volunteerism	Unpaid, not tied to academic credit; supports a meaningful cause; flexible commitment	Varies (from hours to months)	- Hands-on evaluation of potential employees - Boosts community engagement - Enhances Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) - Enhances company brand

Experiential Learning Program Examples From Some of GCU's Employers

- **Benchmark Electronics – Capstone Project**
 - Industry partner sponsored the ongoing development of a manufacturing robot
 - The partner mentored an interdisciplinary team of students
 - All intellectual property developed from capstone remained with industry partner
 - Student participants became potential internship and full-time hires for the company
- **Transact Campus – Summer Internship**
 - Remote, paid 10-week internship for junior/senior-level undergraduate students
 - Entailed curated assignments with a capstone project
 - Each intern was assigned a mentor manager and executive leader
 - Interns had the potential of being invited to continue their internship into the fall and/or the following summer

“I am learning more than I was expecting. This is my third internship and this was by far the best one. I appreciate the engagement from the C-suite executives.” – Ben Bustamante, GCU student

- **Disney College Program**
 - Paid, semester-long, multi-disciplinary immersion program
 - Students live in payroll-deducted residence halls near Disney resorts
 - Students can earn three to six elective college credits
 - 46 Disney College Program interns in Fall 2024, ranking GCU in the top 10 nationwide
- **Amazon Operations Externship**
 - Job shadowing for sophomores exploring operations management
 - Hands-on experience at an Amazon Fulfillment Center
 - Includes mentorship pairing
 - Three to five days; scheduled during spring break

Build the Future with Grand Canyon University

Partnering with GCU for experiential learning not only helps students grow — but it can also help your organization grow. Whether you're looking to hire interns, provide job-shadowing opportunities or develop long-term talent through apprenticeships, we're here to support you.

How to Create an Internship Program Tailored to Your Business Needs

Just as companies vary in size, industry and goals, so do their internship programs. How do you design an internship that aligns with your organization's unique needs? The process can be broken down into three essential steps.

Is an Intern the Right Fit for Your Company?

Before moving forward, consider these key questions:

- Are there meaningful projects or assignments that will provide interns with valuable learning and work experiences?
- Can your company dedicate time to mentoring students, fostering community relationships and providing insight into your industry?
- Would your business benefit from fresh perspectives, technological skills and up-to-date industry knowledge from students?
- Does your company have a passion for shaping the next generation of professionals?

If you answered “yes” to these questions, your organization is well-positioned to support an intern.

If you are not quite sure, schedule a time to connect with GCU Career Services and we can discuss various options to fill your organization's candidate needs.

“Every GCU intern we have hired for the summer or during school, has hit the ground running. They are adding value after a very short time on the job.”

– Peter Hushek, Phoenix Heat Treating



Step 1: Define Your Goals

Before launching an internship program, clarify its objectives:

- What does your company aim to achieve through the program?
- Do you need extra hands for a project or are you searching for potential future employees?
- Is your company expanding quickly and in need of motivated talent?
- Are you looking to develop management potential in new hires?

Engaging leadership in discussions about these goals ensures that everyone is aligned. Since managers will play a key role in the internship experience, their commitment is crucial to a positive outcome.

Step 2: Develop a Clear Plan

A well-structured plan provides clarity for both interns and those overseeing the program. Consider these elements:

- **Job Description:** Define the intern's role — will they work on a project, provide support or rotate through departments?
- **Compensation:** Decide if the position is paid.¹ If so, offer competitive wages and transparently list the minimum pay in the posting to build trust.
- **Qualifications:** Specify required education and skills to attract the right candidates.
- **Supervision and Mentorship:** Assign a mentor or supervisor who has the time and enthusiasm to guide the intern's growth.
- **Work Schedule:** Set weekly hours, considering academic commitments.
- **Work Location:** Specify whether the internship will be on-site, remote or hybrid.
- **Program Enhancements:** Will you offer training, evaluations, networking or social events to enrich the experience?

¹ GCU strongly encourages offering paid internships to boost candidate interest and align with industry standards, as outlined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). If your organization faces budget constraints and is unable to offer paid internships, please reach out to Career Services to explore alternative options. NACE link: naceweb.org/internships

Posting on GCU's Employer Network: Career Connections

Grand Canyon University is a proud user of Symplicity, providing students with seamless access to career opportunities through the Career Connections job board. Our students consistently review Career Connections to explore the latest active job postings, internships and experiential learning opportunities, helping them stay connected with employers and valuable career pathways. With many employers competing for student talent, your internship posting should stand out and capture interest.

Key Considerations Before Writing the Posting:

- What makes your internship opportunity more appealing than others in the industry?
- Does the description effectively showcase the unique experiences interns will gain?
- Are the benefits and incentives of the internship clearly outlined?

A well-crafted internship description helps attract the right candidates. Use clear and concise language that reflects both the position's responsibilities and your company culture. If the internship offers exposure to multiple aspects of the organization, make sure to highlight this. Interns appreciate knowing expectations upfront.

Essential Elements of an Internship Description:

- **Company Overview:** Briefly describe the organization's mission, goals and values.
- **Internship Responsibilities:** Outline key tasks and projects, emphasizing learning opportunities.
- **Skills and Qualifications:** Specify required skills (e.g., technical, analytical, communication) and preferred academic background (e.g., major, GPA, year in school).
- **Internship Duration and Schedule:** Clarify time commitments, including weekly hours, semester availability and scheduling flexibility.
- **Compensation Details:** Indicate whether the position is paid or unpaid. Highlight additional benefits for the candidate, such as remote or hybrid work, company community service or other types of perks that may be attractive to university-level candidates.

A compelling and well-structured description can help attract top candidates while setting clear expectations for both the employer and the intern.

Step 3: Provide Effective Supervision

Interns need structured guidance to flourish. Assign a supervisor who is:

- Knowledgeable in the field
- Available for regular check-ins
- Skilled in leadership and communication
- Willing to invest time in mentorship

Since internships are learning experiences, supervision should be ongoing. Regular check-ins (biweekly meetings are recommended) help track progress, provide feedback and address any challenges. Some supervisors hold informal check-ins over lunch, while others schedule more formal discussions.

By creating a structured, well-thought-out internship program, your company can develop young talent while gaining fresh insights and valuable contributions in return.

Suggested Internship Supervisor Responsibilities?

- Participating in the intern application, screening and interview process
- Leading a structured orientation to introduce interns to the organization's mission and culture
- Developing clear learning goals that align with both company objectives and student growth
- Conducting regular check-ins to evaluate performance and ensure expectations are being met
- Assessing the effectiveness of the internship program for future improvements

The Role of a Mentor

In addition to a supervisor, having a mentor can greatly enhance the intern's experience. A mentor helps bridge the gap between academics and the professional world by:

- Offering guidance on personal and professional development
- Answering general questions about industry expectations and career pathways
- Providing networking opportunities to help students establish valuable connections in the field

Making an Internship Offer

When you feel you have found the ideal candidate with the appropriate experience, professionalism, maturity and who is a mutually beneficial fit for the organization, make an offer. Just as in a permanent full-time job search, students may be applying and interviewing for internships with multiple organizations. Thus, it is best to make an offer as soon as a decision has been made. At this time, a work schedule should be set, compensation agreed upon and appropriate paperwork completed for human resources needs and the student's internship requirements.



Co-Ops

Cooperative education programs (co-ops) offer a unique opportunity for employers to engage with emerging talent in a more immersive and long-term capacity than traditional internships. Unlike internships, which are typically short-term and may be project-based, co-ops integrate academic learning with extended, hands-on work experience, often spanning multiple semesters. This allows students to make meaningful contributions while gaining deeper industry knowledge. In turn, employers can benefit from a pipeline of well-prepared candidates who can transition seamlessly into full-time roles. If you're interested in exploring the idea of developing a co-op program with Grand Canyon University, please email CareerServices@gcu.edu to schedule an exploratory discussion.



Grand Canyon University Can Help with Mentorship

Grand Canyon University takes pride in its exceptional faculty and staff, who bring a wealth of professional expertise and academic knowledge to support your Interns throughout their internship journey. If you ever need additional mentorship for your interns, please email CareerServices@gcu.edu. Our team will coordinate with the appropriate college to provide the necessary support.

GCU Career Services is Here to Help

Thank you for your commitment to mentoring the next generation of professionals. By engaging with Grand Canyon University interns, you provide students with invaluable opportunities for personal and professional development. Our interns are known for their dedication, servant leadership and professionalism, making them a valuable asset to any team. We are confident that collaborating with our talented students will bring fresh perspectives and meaningful contributions to your organization.



Ready to post your opportunity on our GCU Employer Network, Career Connections? Visit gcu-csm.symplicity.com/, select Employer and follow the instructions to either sign in or create an account.

For more information, additional guidance or to schedule an internship-design meeting or a Co-Op discussion meeting please contact Career Services at:
CareerServices@gcu.edu
gcu-csm.symplicity.com/employers
LinkedIn.com/company/GCUCareerServices



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