

Internship

Internships relate to the provision of practical experience or training in a specific professional field and shall help linking theory and praxis. Internships can be broadly used in diverse thematic areas and are furthermore excellent opportunities for strengthening cooperation with partners. The overall goal can therefore be described as twofold: 1. Internships intend to provide real-life learning opportunities where students can acquire a variety of useful skills and get an orientation what their future field of action might be; 2. from the perspective of the internship provider the goals might be to offer training to a possible future work force, to engage with young and motivated people and ideally adopt a learning attitude by the institution/organization itself where interns are seen as people with fresh ideas and new looks on procedures or processes.

Internships therefore offer real-life experiences and the possibility to deepen knowledge within an organization – from start-ups to established companies. Providing training on the job, the format is practice- and action-oriented. Internships can either be done in a block, lasting from a few weeks up to six months, or they can be done intermittently, lasting some hours or days per week, in parallel to lectures or seminars during the semester.

The challenge is to link academic knowledge with the practical experiences. Students should be able to apply the theoretical knowledge gained at the university while experiencing the challenges and conditions of the world of practice.

Phase 1 – Planning

Define selection criteria for internship providers (e.g. start-ups) and start scouting the partners, considering variety. Consult the partners when designing the course to best integrate their expectations. Plan enough time for attracting students after having contracted the partners. A well-prepared promotion campaign using e.g. social media or newsletters helps to find the “right” participants, especially when you aim at mingling disciplines from different universities. Students must apply by sending a motivation letter, their curriculum vitae (CV), and a partner preference.

Phase 2 – Preparation

The partner must find a suitable challenge with clearly defined tasks, responsibilities and roles as they give orientation. The objective is to receive tangible results in the end. Matching the organizational partners needs and students’ (preferably as teams of 2-5) profiles is a crucial step. Both receive an extensive briefing concerning expectations and procedures. These two aspects decide substantially on the success of the internship. It is recommended to sign a confidential disclosure agreement for the partners’ protection.



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Phase 3 – Starting

A common starting event (e.g. “kick-off”) brings partners and students together. The matching couples get to know each other and the representatives from the organizations make their final choice, based on but not limited to the proposition from the coordinator.

Phase 4 – Internship

During the internship itself, an agreement between the respective students and the partner on working conditions – like working hours and remuneration – is essential. The presence at the work place and ways of communication must be clarified. Ideally, there is a contact person responsible and available for questions. Regular meetings and a supportive (not lecturing) attitude of the partner will improve the cooperating atmosphere and eventually the results.

A midterm meeting of all participants allows a presentation of interim results, exchange of learnings and experiences, reflection and thus mutual learning. Teambuilding and dealing with conflicts may become relevant issues.

Phase 5 – Final Presentation

Sharing results, experiences and learnings can best be facilitated by organizing a final (public) event. All projects realized during the internships are presented and ideally the contact person of the organization participates with a statement on the relevance of the project results. Additionally, a presentation may take place at the partner organization. Issuing a certificate rewards the students’ engagement and may serve as documentation for their CV.

“Our organization benefits from the well-developed and professionally carried out project that was offered by the students.” Partner, Social Association, Vechta, Germany

Benefits

- New ideas, innovative approaches and solutions for organizations
- Gaining professional insights into the business world
- Tackling practical obstacles, taking responsibility for project realization
- Concrete results, tangible output

Success factors

- Selection of interesting and relevant organizations
- Extensive briefing of students and partners
- Openness and curiosity of students
- Partners’ commitment in allocating time and effort

Challenges

- Finding creative and problem-solving tasks (not solely executive)
- Matching students’ profiles with partners’ requirements
- Time allocation of students
- Offer payment or credit points (ECTS) rewarding the students’ work



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