



# GUIDELINES FOR INTERNSHIPS ABROAD

THE  
FORUM  
ON EDUCATION  
ABROAD

## **ABOUT THE FORUM ON EDUCATION ABROAD**

The Forum on Education Abroad is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, membership association recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission as the Standards Development Organization (SDO) for the field of education abroad. The Forum's institutional members include U.S. colleges and universities, overseas institutions, consortia, agencies, provider organizations and foundations.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Forum on Education Abroad serves as the collective voice of U.S. post-secondary education abroad. To benefit students, The Forum develops and disseminates comprehensive standards of good practice, resources and training, advocates for education abroad and its value, and engages the field in critical dialogue.

# GUIDELINES FOR INTERNSHIPS ABROAD

*A companion to the Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad*

## INTRODUCTION

Internships abroad offer valuable and unique opportunities and challenges for students and the institutions and organizations that organize them. While internships abroad can look very similar to internships in the U.S., there are additional issues to consider.

For students, adjusting to a new setting and culture is common to all education abroad experiences. Interns abroad must also learn to navigate the intricacies of the culture of work in their host location. Additionally, an internship abroad may represent a student's first professional work experience, which may include workplace stress and demands. Together, these factors require additional preparation, support, and reflection.

For institutions and organizations, there are many moving parts to manage. Students can go abroad with interning as the primary goal or as one part of their academic program. On U.S. campuses, students may seek advising for international internship opportunities from either the education abroad office, the career services office, or their academic advisors. Generally, career services offices will have more expertise about the values and challenges of internships domestically, and education abroad offices are better equipped to navigate the logistics of experiences abroad and prepare students for the cross-cultural challenges that await them. For each, advising for internship programs abroad is qualitatively different from the advising they do for other types of programs. The best outcome results when these offices work together to ensure that colleagues across the institution, including faculty, are knowledgeable about internships abroad. Organizations coordinating internships can be instrumental in helping advisors understand how internships abroad are different from domestic ones, and how to prepare students effectively.

In all cases, managing the expectations and relationships among the student, the internship site, the coordinating organization, and the multiple stakeholders at the home institution is key. These Guidelines can help stakeholders navigate those relationships by offering advice for facing the specific needs and challenges presented by internships abroad. Use them in conjunction with the *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad*.

## STANDARDS

The *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad* were established in 2004 by The Forum on Education Abroad, recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission as the Standards Development Organization (SDO) for the field of education abroad. They are higher education's benchmark for education abroad program excellence and accountability.

## KEY TERMS

**internship:** a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting;<sup>1</sup> in other countries this may be known as a traineeship

**home institution:** college or university where a student is pursuing their degree of study

**coordinating organization or institution:**<sup>2</sup> the institution or organization responsible for identifying internship sites and connecting students to internship opportunities

**program sponsor:**<sup>3</sup> the institution or organization that sponsors the internship program

**internship site:** workplace where the student completes their internship; also called internship placement or host employer

**internship supervisor:** professional employed by the internship site who is responsible for overseeing the work and experiential learning of an intern in their workplace and for reporting back to the coordinating institution or organization regarding the student's progress

**internship coordinator:** an individual, usually a resident of the host country and often employed by the coordinating organization or institution, who assists education abroad students with locating internship placement opportunities. The coordinator usually determines whether the internships offer meaningful responsibilities, include appropriate supervision and direction, and encourage significant international and intercultural learning

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1 As defined by National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).

2,3 Often, but not always, the sponsor and the coordinating organization are the same entity.

## BEST PRACTICES FOR INTERNSHIPS ABROAD

Successful internships are the result of partnerships that effectively manage and balance the interests of the multiple parties invested in the experience—students, workplaces, coordinating organizations, and home institutions—while promoting transparency of process, clear learning goals, and the ideals of reciprocity and mutual benefit. The following best practices can help achieve these goals.

- a. Establish an understanding and commitment that the primary purpose of the internship experience is learning about a specific field or career, developing skills, and applying knowledge in support of a transition from education to a future profession.
- b. Ensure that the workplace is reasonably safe, with protections against discrimination, harassment, and exploitation.
- c. Ensure that the workplace identifies experienced professional(s) who can effectively mentor, manage and supervise interns.
- d. Aim to create relationships of reciprocity and mutual benefit between partner organizations and institutions and the host community.
- e. Offer students professional development support necessary for securing an internship placement, e.g., goal-setting, preparing resumes and cover letters, interview skills.
- f. Ensure that projects and tasks are substantive but appropriate for a student, and that students are not asked to perform tasks beyond their level of training and skill.
- g. Uphold the highest standards of ethics, integrity, and professionalism among staff, faculty, students, and partner organizations.
- h. Work with experienced local colleagues to identify respectful and appropriate behaviors in the workplace and the community.
- i. Introduce students to other aspects of the work environment and location, e.g., informational interviews and social or community events.
- j. Over the course of the experience and afterwards, guide and encourage students to reflect on how the internship is contributing to their academic, professional, and personal goals.
- k. Give students tools to leverage their international internship experience in pursuit of further academic and professional opportunities.
- l. Regularly evaluate and assess all partners to ensure that internship goals and responsibilities are being met.

## **GUIDELINES FOR INTERNSHIPS ABROAD**

Use the following guidelines, along with the *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad*, when developing internship programs and/or vetting potential partners.

### **1. MISSION AND GOALS FOR INTERNSHIPS ABROAD**

- Establish that the primary goal for an internship abroad is to integrate knowledge and theory with practical applications to offer students experiential learning in a professional setting.
- Clearly articulate how the internship program relates to, supports, and enhances the institution or education abroad organization's mission and goals.

## 2. STUDENT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN INTERNSHIPS ABROAD

- Identify appropriate student learning and development outcomes specific to the experience.
- Ask students to identify and outline their own academic, professional, and personal goals for the experience in addition to those set by the program, institution, or organization.
- Clearly and explicitly distinguish between academic/for-credit and co-curricular/non-credit internships, if both are offered.
- Clearly define learning goals, intended outcomes, and the connection between experiential and academic components of the experience and communicate these to students.
- Clearly articulate the academic and work responsibilities of the students.
- Reinforce the student's responsibility to balance academic and work obligations; help students navigate conflicts that might arise between academic and work responsibilities.
- Challenge and mentor the student to establish learning goals that cultivate professional leadership competencies and cultural competencies.
- Ensure that mechanisms are in place to assess whether students are meeting learning objectives during the internship.
- Ensure that the student is adequately supervised by a professional and offered feedback on their work by a designated supervisor at the internship site.
- Ensure the best possible match between the internship placement and the student's goals, knowledge, skills, and competencies (including language competencies, if applicable).

### 3. ACADEMIC FRAMEWORK OF INTERNSHIPS ABROAD

- Clearly articulate the internship program’s learning objectives and their alignment to career leadership and readiness competencies.
- Clearly communicate criteria for the awarding of credit for credit-bearing internships, which may include:
  - ▶ Number of work hours required
  - ▶ Method of verifying hours worked
  - ▶ Attendance in an in-person or online class or seminar, as required
  - ▶ Readings, assignments, reflective journals, or other academic components as required
  - ▶ Criteria, including deadlines, for evaluating assignments
- Check in with students regularly and offer feedback and evaluation on both the academic and work components of the internship during the program.
- Maintain consistency among academic components of an internship for students across a sponsoring institution or organization regardless of their internship placement.

#### 4. STUDENT SELECTION, PREPARATION, AND ADVISING FOR INTERNSHIPS ABROAD

- Ensure that mechanisms for selecting, preparing, and advising students are transparent and consistent.
- Require students to communicate with their home institution and academic department to verify requirements for completing an internship for credit.
- Make deadlines and timelines for the following clearly accessible to students who may be interested in an internship program:
  - ▶ application to the program;
  - ▶ application to internship placement(s);
  - ▶ interviews;
  - ▶ notification of acceptance;
  - ▶ confirmation of placement;
  - ▶ internship start and end dates.
- Provide students with a detailed list of the internship program costs and any additional expenses (e.g., commuting expenses) for which they will be responsible.
- Inform students that a non-credit internship may impact their full-time student status, possibly affecting their financial aid and scholarship eligibility.
- Confirm visa and work permit requirements for interns, which are often of a different type and/or have different requirements from traditional student visas.
- Provide students with the following information when confirming their internship placements:
  - ▶ Name and description of the internship site (workplace) and the nature of its work, including any observation or entry-level tasks;
  - ▶ A description of the scope and nature of internship responsibilities;
  - ▶ Respective responsibilities of the student, the internship site, the internship coordinator, and the home institution and/or sponsoring organization;
  - ▶ Student's primary contact (coordinator or supervisor) on-site (name, email, phone number);

- ▶ Required time commitment (schedule, hours per day, number of weeks);
- ▶ Requirements and competencies that will impact the student's success in the placement (skills, academic background, language ability);
- ▶ Expectations of professionalism and appropriate conduct unique to the host culture;
- ▶ Essential eligibility requirements, including but not limited to: physical abilities, drug testing, confidentiality, privacy, and non-compete policies and agreements;
- ▶ Learning objectives for the experience;
- ▶ Rate of compensation and any other benefits (if any);
- ▶ Requirements for the granting of academic credit (if applicable);
- ▶ An accurate description of the distance between the internship location and student housing, as well as the means and cost of transportation to commute between the two locations; clear communication as to whether these costs are the student's responsibility or not.
- Ensure a clear, direct line of communication between the internship supervisor and the internship coordinator.
- Ensure a clear, direct line of communication between the student and the staff or faculty member to contact in case of an issue or emergency at the internship site.
- Provide on-site orientation and job training to equip interns to be responsible partners in their placements and models of professional conduct.
- Within the first week of the student's internship placement, ensure the student and the internship supervisor meet to establish an agreed upon work plan based on the confirmed job description.
- Establish and communicate to the student criteria for any performance reviews and evaluation.
- Inform the student of cultural differences and values that may impact their internship experience, including:
  - ▶ dress code
  - ▶ punctuality
  - ▶ work ethic

- ▶ relative independence of subordinates; the degree of autonomy that is appropriate for students within their assigned roles
- ▶ organizational and social hierarchies
- ▶ interactions with coworkers in the office
- ▶ socializing with coworkers outside the workplace
- ▶ humor
- ▶ language specific to the workplace, e.g., field-specific vocabulary, honorifics, and signs of respect
- ▶ gender roles
- ▶ use of technology in the internship site, e.g. checking personal cell phone or social media during work hours, and sharing information about the internship site on social media
- ▶ social, economic, and political contexts of the work
- ▶ culturally-appropriate means for resolving workplace issues
- Make students aware that what is acceptable within the work culture and the non-work culture may not be the same. Prepare them to be respectful and appropriate in both contexts.
- Train students to be aware of and comply with policies internal to the internship site and applicable to the work at hand, e.g., licensing, research ethics, data privacy, and security.

## 5. STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY MEASURES FOR INTERNSHIPS ABROAD

- Inform students that coordinating organization and/or home institution codes of conduct also apply when students are in the internship setting.
- Ensure that students and supervisors are aware of consequences for inappropriate behavior and/or non-compliance. Explain these to the student and the supervisor and provide them in writing (see §4).
- Make students aware of their obligation to act within the limits of their knowledge and competencies and within the role prescribed for them as interns.
- Ensure that students understand that commitment to their work means that missing work may only occur under specific circumstances as allowed by the internship site. For example, their personal independent travel is planned around the work schedule.
- Encourage internship supervisors to communicate clearly and with as much notice as possible any specific work activities that the student will be expected to attend outside of their normal working hours.
- Inform students of their responsibility to know the limitations of their work hours, pay (if applicable), and other restrictions that may be governed by their host country visa.
  - ▶ Train students to communicate with their internship supervisor when any requests made of them involve non-compliance with visa restrictions.

## 6. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR INTERNSHIPS ABROAD

- Appoint a designated supervisor at the internship organization to mentor and support the student and manage the relationship.
- Establish and maintain direct, open, and ongoing lines of communication between the student, the supervisor, and the coordinating staff.
- Clearly delineate and agree upon roles and responsibilities of all parties, with care taken to assign responsibilities to the party best equipped with the knowledge and expertise to carry out each task.
- Identify any confidentiality, non-disclosure and/or non-compete, licensing, research ethics, data privacy and security, etc. with which the student and/or the participating institutions and organizations are required to comply.
  - ▶ Maintain student privacy to the extent possible. For example, medical information or history is not disclosed unless there is a clear need for internship placements to be aware of it, and if so, only after the placement decision has been made and only with permission of the student.

## **7. ORGANIZATIONAL AND PROGRAM RESOURCES FOR INTERNSHIPS ABROAD**

- Collaborate with internship coordinators and supervisors to determine specific criteria for overseeing internships, monitoring performance, and evaluating internships before the student begins their internship.
- Ensure the work environment and facilities are adequate and appropriate to the scope and nature of the work at hand.
- Assist internship supervisors and other employees of the internship site to be prepared for the unique challenges of an international student intern through training or written resources. This is especially important in countries or industries where internships are less common.
- Consistently and regularly evaluate companies/organizations that host interns to ensure that they are complying with the agreed upon parameters of the internship and offering students a valuable learning experience.
- Inform students of their options in case the internship site is unable to fulfill their obligation. To the extent possible, make efforts to arrange another internship or otherwise enable the student to earn the internship credit (if applicable).
- Regularly evaluate faculty and/or staff members who oversee internships.

## **8. HEALTH, SAFETY, SECURITY, AND RISK MANAGEMENT FOR INTERNSHIPS ABROAD**

- Review relevant individual student physical and mental health information prior to arrival on-site to identify any special considerations or accommodations that might need to be taken into account in the placement process.
- Ensure that the work environment is safe and non-threatening for students.
- Provide site-specific guidance regarding sexual misconduct, local resources for protection and support, and instructions for accessing support from the internship provider and home institution.
- Provide students clear information regarding any potential health and safety risks and emergency planning specific to the internship setting.
- Educate students about their personal responsibility for their physical and mental wellbeing while abroad, including awareness of symptoms of workplace stress.
- Make students aware of their right to decline when asked to perform activities outside the scope of their training and abilities, and train students to decline in a respectful and appropriate manner if the need arises.
- Ensure that appropriate health, safety, and security measures are in place in case of emergency, including an emergency contact on location.

## 9. ETHICS AND INTERNSHIPS ABROAD

- Consider and prepare for the impact of the placement and student presence on local and organizational resources, economic conditions, and social, cultural, and political hierarchies.
- Make efforts to establish trusting, sustainable relationships that ensure the internship is mutually beneficial to the student and the internship site.
- Ensure honest and transparent communication regarding the preparation and abilities of students between sending institutions, coordinating organizations, and internship sites.
- Where applicable, provide students with guidance related to the accepted code(s) of professional ethics for the field in which they are working.
- Engage with and recognize existing industries and organizations on-site. Student interns should not displace, disregard or circumvent local workers.
- When the internship involves work with vulnerable and/or low-resource communities, ensure that students receive training appropriate for work with these populations.
- If the internship includes a research component, establish processes for:
  - ▶ distributing research results, final reports, and/or audio-visual products to internship sites in the language in which the work was conducted;
  - ▶ ensuring that local contributors are appropriately acknowledged for their contributions to the work;
  - ▶ following appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes and/or any other on-site review measures for work involving human subjects.

**A NOTE ON COOPERATIVE LEARNING (CO-OP) EXPERIENCES ABROAD**

Cooperative learning (co-op) experiences provide a student paid practice in a chosen profession or career towards which the student has already carried out substantial coursework or training. The work experience is often a requirement for a degree, certificate, or other credential. The primary purpose is generally the educational value of the work experience itself, and it is usually conducted more independently of the home institution than an internship. The work site provides the primary structure, and, when applicable, credit is awarded based on an evaluation of the work experience. To the degree to which the home institution or coordinating organization has management of on-site activity, the same considerations apply to cooperative learning experiences abroad as to internships abroad.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Forum thanks the following individuals for their contribution to the preparation of these Guidelines:

Andrea Custodi, *CET Academic Programs*

Cynthia Engel, *CEA Study Abroad*

Amity Fox, *Dickinson College*

Terence Coetzee & Julie Kelly, *EUSA*

Julie Andreshak-Behrman, Rebecca Claris, Patrick Gorman, Dimpy Patel, Silvia Angeloro, Eleanor Dall, *FIE*

Kelly Holland & Carri Orrison, *Global Experiences*

David Lloyd, *The Intern Group*

Darin Menlove, Randeep Kullar & Tracy Weber, *University of California, Berkeley*

Michael True, *Messiah College*

The Forum also thanks the education abroad and higher education professionals who shared their feedback and suggestions during the public comment period.



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