Internships, Externships, & Summer Jobs

Getting experience is one of the best ways to investigate whether or not a career area is appropriate for you. There are many ways that you can “test” a career during your college years. All of these opportunities provide you with insight into a career field that can lead to better decision-making down the road.

Experience is highly valued by potential employers – even short-term or volunteer work. The experience on your resume shows your interest in a career field, as well as the career specific skills you have developed. Interest and skills are great indicators of your ability to contribute and succeed in their organization.

Many job opportunities develop out of summer jobs, internships, externships, volunteering, or networking with career professionals (see our handout on Networking). Having seen the quality of your work in these settings, an employer can hire you with confidence.

Ways to Gain Experience

Coursework

One easy way to get a feel for a career area is to choose academic courses accordingly. If you think you might be interested in a business career, consider taking a course in the Commerce School. If you think you’d like to do scientific research, enroll in some lab science courses.

Some courses have fieldwork or a practicum associated with them. You may also want to think about doing an independent study or directed research with a professor of your choice. Opportunities will vary according to your field of interest.
Networking
Having conversations with people who have careers of interest to you is one of the best ways to test your interest in that field. UCAN is a database of alumni that includes specific career information. Alumni are great resources for networking and informational interviews. Access this database at [http://hoosonline.imodules.com/] and search for alums by industry, occupation, employer, major, city, etc. Review UCS’s handout, “Networking & Informational Interviewing” for tips on how to contact people in the network, prepare questions, etc.

Externships
Have you thought about law, photography, marketing, zoology, or medicine? Externships are a low-risk way to explore a career in the short-term, whether over the summer, a few times during the semester, or as part of your Spring Break or J-Term experience. If you would like to learn how to establish your own externship, make an appointment with a career counselor or visit our website: [www.career.virginia.edu/students/externship].

Experiential Internships
UCS receives hundreds of internship notices from organizations and alumni throughout the country. Occasionally, UCS will send this information out via targeted e-mails. Here are additional resources.

- **CAVLink** is an online listing service that includes jobs, internships, and externships. You may search the listings based on your geographic preference, industry, major, or by company name.
- **Print and Online Resources:** We have over 100 resources for finding internships in many different career fields and locations, included several internship search tools exclusively for UVa students. Visit our UCS Internship Page for more information: [https://www.career.virginia.edu/internship/]
- **Programs:** Each year, our Career Peer Educators conduct in-office programs that show students all the essentials they need to start an internship search. For the latest dates and times, see the UCS Web Calendar and pre-register for a session.
- **Internship Advising:** To learn other ways of finding internships, you may set up an individual career counseling session. For up-to-date information on appointments or other ways to connect with career counselors, please call UCS at (434) 924-8900 or visit our website at [www.career.virginia.edu].
- **Fairs:** Every year, UCS hosts several career fairs where employers come to U.Va. to discuss their internship opportunities with interested students. Check our UCS Web Calendar or our Events page for upcoming fair info and employer lists.

Academic Internships
Some internships are taken for academic credit. They are most often unpaid and usually last for one or two semesters. Some academic departments sponsor internships and will determine the relevant policies and guidelines, academic work assigned, and amount of credit granted.
Employers also sponsor academic internships. In these situations, the student generally bears the responsibility of finding a way to earn credit on their own. Although internship advising is available at UCS to help you find your internship, we are not an academic department and cannot offer credit. If you independently acquire an internship and need to receive credit, it may be possible for you to contract with either the University Internship Program or a professor who teaches a subject related to the internship. In the latter situation, it is also advisable for you to consult with your academic advisor.

**University Internship Program (UIP):** U.Va.’s formal intern program is offered through the psychology/sociology departments and is available to fourth-year students of any major. UIP is a two-semester, 8 credit course requiring 10 hours of work per week in the field. Interested students should apply during the second semester of their third year. To learn more, call 982-5552 or visit [http://www.coopercenter.org/uiip/](http://www.coopercenter.org/uiip/).

**Extracurricular Activities/Volunteering**

Extracurricular activities are an excellent way to explore your career-related interests and develop skills you can transfer to the workplace. If you think you may be interested in a customer or client-based role, look into student leadership opportunities like Orientation Leader. If writing for print or online media is one of your career ideas, consider joining the staff of the *Cavalier Daily* or a local publication. Do you like to lead people and projects? Investigate getting involved with Student Council. There are hundreds of extracurricular activities in which you can become involved. Also, few non-profit employers will turn down the services of an industrious, cheerful, and interested volunteer. Volunteering is a great way to gain experience and contacts that can help you secure a paying job later. Visit the UVa Learning in Action website at [http://www.virginia.edu/publicservice/](http://www.virginia.edu/publicservice/) for additional ideas both in Charlottesville and throughout the U.S. and abroad.

**Summer Jobs/Part-Time Work/Temping**

These experiences differ from internships in that you are typically assured wages for your efforts often. The type of work involved may or may not be project-based, as is often the case in internships. Many companies will hire you for the summer even if they don’t have a formal program provided that you can demonstrate how you will help the organization. Even if your position is not called an internship, you can still develop valuable skills and gain experience in a professional setting.

TIP: *The best way to get hired is to directly contact employers of interest instead of relying on advertised positions. Advertisements are intended to be highly visible and, by nature, they make the position more competitive.*

**Step by Step “How-To”**

**A. Set Your Priorities**

Consider what you are looking for in a summer experience:
B. Evaluate Your Needs
You will benefit enormously from getting “real life” work exposure while you are still in college. To some extent, the type of jobs available to you depends upon your qualifications, your access to transportation, and your financial needs. You’ll need to consider the cost of living if you decide not to live with your family. Remember: salary is important, but there are other benefits of a summer opportunity.

C. Determine Your Strengths
As you begin to set your priorities, it is also important to begin to think about what you have to offer a prospective employer. What personal traits, skills, and experience do you hope to “sell”?

- I learn quickly.
- I have great people skills.
- I am responsible.
- I write well.
- I’m good with numbers.
- I speak Chinese.
- I’m very analytical.
- I’m accurate with details.

Not sure what skills to promote? Review the following chart, which lists the primary skills employers of college students and recent graduates look for in their new hires.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill/Quality</th>
<th>Weighted average rating*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work in a team structure</td>
<td>4.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to make decisions and solve problems</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work</td>
<td>4.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to obtain and process information</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to analyze quantitative data</td>
<td>4.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical knowledge related to the job</td>
<td>3.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficiency with computer software programs</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to create and/or edit written reports</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to sell or influence others</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*5-point scale, where 1=Not at all important; 2=Not very important; 3=Somewhat important; 4=Very important; and 5=Extremely important

Source: Job Outlook 2013, National Association of Colleges and Employers

Don’t sell yourself short when you’re thinking about what you have to offer an employer. If you don’t have confidence in yourself and enthusiasm for the jobs you are seeking, you are not likely to get hired. Convey your confidence that you can do a job well and your interest in doing it. If you need help with this piece, our career counselors can help you identify your strengths.

D. Research Your Options

- UCS online resources: UCS Internships Page (https://www.career.virginia.edu/internship/), UCAN, searchable databases in MyUCS, profiles of student interns who are received a Parents Committee Internship Grant.
- Talk to friends, parents, and alumni. Develop a network of career contacts.
- Use social media to connect to companies and organizations you like. Follow blogs or connect with recruiters on LinkedIn. Find employers that may need summer help, but haven’t advertised.
- Directly contact employers of interest. If you’re unsure of how to do this, check out the Hoos Career Guide for excellent examples of emails and telephone scripts.

E. Take Action!

If you feel that your network of personal contacts is weak, expand it! Remember that there is some truth to the saying “it’s who you know.” News of most jobs is primarily spread by word-of-mouth. The people in your network can be a great advantage to you – often, personal contacts can suggest employment leads or introduce you to people who may have positions available. Get your parents networking for you -- you may be surprised how many connections they have!

Identify organizations for which you would like to work and try to get names of people within them. Take the initiative to seek advice from professionals in your career field about how you can
acquire some experience. Seeking advice and information is a legitimate means of increasing your understanding of a particular career field and getting summer job leads. Again, you may want to consult the UCAN database.

F. Timing Your Internship Search

One strategy for developing your timeline is to determine when application deadlines generally take place for your career field of interest and work backward to plan time for researching opportunities and preparing your materials (i.e. resume, cover letter, formal application essays, etc.).

Although there is no “one size fits all” timeline for the internship search process, general guidelines can provide a basic time frame in which to research, plan, and apply. When in doubt, start early! At least begin thinking about what you want to learn about and contact UCS in the fall semester. If application deadlines do not come up until Spring, by getting your priorities in order, you can rest assured you will be ready.

A Final Note...

Regardless of how you spend your summer or free time during the academic year, make sure to update your resume at the end of the experience while it is still fresh in your mind. You may also want to send thank-you notes to your direct supervisor and other colleagues and let them know if you would like to use them as references in the future. And don’t forget to connect with any and all colleagues on LinkedIn so that you can start building your network!