

## A Guide to Hiring a College Student Intern—A Perfect Match

The timing may be right to consider hiring an intern. In this tight employment market where there is a talent shortage and an abundance of college students from the colleges and universities that surround our community, many students are just looking for a “foot in the door”.

An academic internship is a short term (one semester or more) commitment where an employer has the opportunity to contribute to and influence the educational development of a college student, and at the same time help to build our community’s workforce. For the student, it means on-the-job learning and pre-professional work experience to put on a resume as well as an opportunity to apply academic knowledge to work situations, earning credit that meets academic and career goals, career exploration, and professional networking.

As a Business Faculty member and Internship Coordinator of the Business Program at Penn State Wilkes-Barre for the past nine years, I’ve enjoyed making the match with so many local businesses and college students. I’d like to provide an insider’s guide to what you, the employer, need to know to forge new working relationships and develop effective partnerships with college students, the faculty internship instructors, and their universities.

Whether you are a small mainstream business or a large international employer, for profit or not-for-profit, expanding your pool of qualified potential employees can be a challenge in these tough economic times.

What is on the minds of many companies today?

- Minimizing the risk of a bad hire that results in high turnover
- Reducing the expenses associated with recruiting, training, and orienting new full-time employees
- Saving money in hiring fresh eyes without the expense of hiring someone with a lot of experience, and
- Molding and grooming someone that may help the business grow.

Follow these six steps if you’d like to offer an academic internship experience:

### Step #1 Plan

First, assess the needs of your business. Focus on tasks and responsibilities an intern could provide that will fill a gap. You may have a special project that you can’t seem to find time to complete. In any case, tasks should be challenging for the intern. Identify the time period that you need an intern, and take into account the academic semesters including Fall, Spring, and Summer. Consider full or part time status as well as paid or voluntary options.

Second, identify how the student will fit into the organization. Who will they report to? A supervisor should be appointed to oversee internship assignment and assess the students’ performance.

Third, prepare a job description that outlines the knowledge and skills the student will learn, and the experiences they will gain.

### Step #2 Recruit

Local colleges and universities, as well as community organizations will provide assistance with locating potential students. Make connections with Internship Coordinators, faculty, and career counselors on

local college campuses. Think about being a guest speaker to discuss career opportunities in your field or participate in college career fairs. Contact local organizations whose mission is to attract and retain a talented workforce like the Great Valley Technology Alliance and Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Post the internship description on your web site.

Timing is everything. Recruit from December to February for summer interns, March to May for fall interns, and September to November for spring interns.

### Step #3 Interview

The Career Services Office located on college campuses teach students the correct procedure for applying for an internship or a full time job. Students have resumes, and know how to write cover letters. They have been instructed on how to interview. However, their interview with you may be their first. They will send you a thank you note after the interview, and will wait for your reply. It is important for you to communicate your expectations for the intern, and indicate when and how you will follow up.

### Step #4 Select

You have the opportunity to hire a student based upon your own selection criteria. You will want to hire someone who appears to be a solid choice that really wants to work for you, is qualified, and motivated to do the job. Since the supervisor will oversee the interns work, they should also be involved in selecting the best candidate.

Once a position has been offered to the student, the students' internship instructor will ensure that there is sufficient academic activity to merit the awarding of credit by reviewing the job description and give final approval.

When the match is made, the internship instructor will contact the work site supervisor who will be working directly with the student. They will track student progress throughout the semester through conversations with student and work site supervisor and review student assignments.

### Step #5 Orientation and Training

Creating a professional environment conducive to student learning is important to establish with the student. During this period, carefully explain goals for internship experience and identify outcomes. Familiarize the student with the necessary resources to support their success.

Don't expect students to know everything. They may be afraid to "ask" so have an open door policy for asking questions. Provide supervision, guidance, and feedback.

The internship instructor will supply and coordinate necessary paperwork throughout the internship period including preparation of learning agreements and completion of preliminary, mid-semester and final evaluations.

### Step #6. Appraising

Supervisor and student assessment is important to the university. It reaffirms the viability of the program and its function of providing an education with the end result of students being prepared for full time employment.

In addition to reviewing student and supervisors' written evaluation of student progress, the internship instructor is available for consultation any time, to discuss student progress. The internship instructor will evaluate student performance, and assign a grade.

Your final evaluation may include offering the student full time employment. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), internships are employers' #1 method of recruiting new hires. Employers responding to NACE's 2007 Recruiting Benchmarks Survey reported that they offered full-time jobs to nearly two out of three of their interns. More than 70 percent of those offers were accepted; nearly half of the interns came on board as full-time hires. Overall, employers reported that nearly 31 percent of all their new college graduate hires from the Class of 2006 came from their own internship program.

Along with my Internship Coordinator colleagues at the many fine colleges and universities in our community, I am eager to help you find a perfect match.

Students emerge as reliable, dependable employees that produce quality work. They've learned first-hand how to work with others, take initiative, communicate effectively, think critically, and solve problems.

Perfect—just what employers want!

## About the Author

**Theresa Ansilio Clemente (Terry)** is a Full-Time Business Instructor and Business Internship Coordinator at Penn State Wilkes-Barre. Clemente has taught numerous marketing and small business courses on an undergraduate level. In addition, she coordinates the internship program for the business department. Clemente functions as academic advisor and as advisor for Business Club. She was the recipient of the 2007/2008 “Hayfield Award for Faculty Member of the Year” and the 2007 “Advisor of the Year” award.

Clemente participates in campus and off campus activities, including membership in: Co–Chair of the Campus Environment Team, Faculty Advisory Member at The Institute for Public Policy and Economic Development, Visiting Nurse Association Advisory Board, and Faculty Representative at the Great Valley Technology Alliance Business Plan Competition. She is involved with assisting profit and non-profit businesses through service learning projects.

Prior to her employment at Penn State, Clemente was an Assistant Business Professor at Misericordia University. She held a number of senior marketing positions in the private sector before beginning her teaching career. Clemente holds a Master of Business Administration, St. Joseph’s University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She is involved as a volunteer and member in a number of community organizations.

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