



Creating Your Own Internship

Sometimes it takes thinking outside the box to find an internship opportunity that aligns with your interests and values, utilizes your strengths, *and* develops specific new skills. In addition to applying to posted positions, many UP students have had success creating an internship with an existing contact, or via direct outreach to an organization of interest. Factor this process into your [Internship Search Action Plan](#). This handout outlines suggested steps to create your own internship.

Creating your own internship is about harnessing your existing skills, developing professional connections within your field of interest, and being persistent. Sometimes this is simply a matter of good timing, or consistent follow-up.

Every situation and employer is unique so select the strategies that makes the most sense for you. It is always best to meet with a Career Center staff member to receive advice and feedback on how to best approach this given your goals and skills, *prior* to contacting the organization.

Potential Organizations to Contact:

- **Contact a previous employer.** Students regularly have success in creating an internship by connecting with previous part-time job employers and adding value to the organization based on first-hand knowledge of an organization's needs and how they can apply their area of academic study.
 - *Examples:* A student who worked at an ice cream shop in customer service created a social media presence and formalized a marketing internship. A student who was working as a server in a restaurant proposed working on a project for the accounting department of the restaurant.
- **Research and connect with organizations in the industry or location in which you are hoping to work.** Search for companies using Handshake, LinkedIn, Idealist.org, Glassdoor.com, the local Chamber of Commerce, [professional association member organizations](#) and other sites. *It may be that an organization already has an internship program* with established positions and objectives. *If an organization does not have an established internship program*, it may be possible to propose an internship or project-based experience. Employers often want to host an intern but haven't had adequate time to develop a thorough internship position description. It will be in your best interest to propose what you would bring to the organization, as well as what your learning goals would be for the internship.

How to Contact the Organization:

If you are contacting a previous employer, ask to have a conversation to discuss your goals and future contributions to the team. You will still want to have intentionally brainstormed and outlined your intended learning goals and proposed responsibilities, as outlined in the following section.

If you are reaching out to any other organization or individual professional, there are a couple of approaches you could take in your outreach: ask for an [informational interview](#) or **send an inquiry email**. It is recommended that you reach out and ask for an informational interview, where the goal is to obtain information and learn as much as you can about occupations and industries within the field and organization—not to directly ask for an internship. You will build a professional relationship and form an *inside connection* at the organization. This relational process takes time. Once you've gotten to know them, if you feel comfortable, you can pitch your idea for an internship and how it will be mutually beneficial to both you and the organization. You will gain career advice and insight in the meantime!

A second option, **sending an inquiry email**, thoughtfully focuses on the possibility of an internship with the organization by explaining *why* you are interested in the organization and proposing *what you could do for them* (not what they can do for you!). Students at UP have had success with this method, however it takes targeted research and knowledge of



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the organization, diligence in follow-up, and resilience in knowing that it may not align for both you and the organization. After this initial inquiry email, it would be best to follow up with a phone call to the organization or individual within several business days. You can use the language from this [Requesting to Network](#) handout, for detailed instructions on what to say on the phone.

There are many variables within this process (industry hiring timelines; busy seasons; existing professional connection versus a “cold email”) so select the methods that makes the most sense for you and the organizations you’re interested in. Be mindful that professionals are busy and emails can easily get overlooked. If you don’t get a response by phone or email within several weeks, it is completely acceptable to follow up by phone or email after your initial outreach to check in. They might just need a reminder!

Before your conversation, you should thoughtfully outline your goals and proposed duties and responsibilities based on your understanding of the organization, the problems they may face, and how you can solve those problems by way of what you’re proposing for your internship. **When you talk with them, remain open and flexible as your research and preparation might not reflect their current needs.**

But First, Consider Your Learning Goals:

Prior to contacting the organization, you should spend a significant amount of time considering the learning goals that you have in mind for completing an internship. ***What do you hope to do, learn, experience, understand, gain, etc.?*** What you hope to learn should shape how you propose responsibilities and projects for the internship. You should also have an idea of the types of training opportunities, job shadowing and meetings with other staff members (i.e., networking opportunities) that you would like to have access to during the internship.

Learning goals may pertain to the following categories:

- **Knowledge development:** Includes ideas, concepts, knowledge or theories related to your academic major, minor, or area of concentration. *Example: I will gain an understanding of the legislative and economic pressures impacting healthcare availability/affordability by completing research on voter’s feelings about these pressures.*
- **Skill Development:** Includes oral or written communication, critical thinking, problem solving, research, decision making, leadership, interpersonal relationships, project management, or technical skills relating to your professional or academic pursuits. *Example: I will understand the complete development and testing process for an iOS application by writing high quality source code for the beta release of the HealthNET Application at the end of July.*
- **Professional Career Development:** Includes exploration of an industry or field, specific career positions and paths to get there, skills/training required or organizational structure. Conversations, through informal or formal channels such as informational interviewing or job shadowing with a professional in the field, a professor, or senior manager, are good ways to find out more about a profession that interests you and to learn how to gain entry into the field. *Example: I will meet with and shadow managers in different departments of marketing and product development to see which area interests me more.*
 - **Professional Aspirations:** What are your short- and long-term professional aspirations at present? How might this internship bring you closer to accomplishing your specific professional objectives? *Example: I will meet with a diverse variety of authors, reporters, small presses or agents in order to develop a better understanding of the multitude of career paths within publishing and media.*



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- **Personal Development:** Includes clarification of work and personal values, self-confidence, self-awareness, time management, familiarity with a location, cultural experience or appreciation for diversity. *Example: I will gain more confidence in working within a public history setting by interacting with museum clients and other museum stakeholders daily.*

It is a good idea to prepare by outlining these goals and proposed responsibilities *before* you connect with the professional to whom you'll pitch an internship. *After* your conversation, send them a follow-up with an outline of what you discussed regarding the role, which might differ from what you originally anticipated. They will be very impressed by your organization and initiative.

Elements to Include in an Inquiry Email:

- Your contact information, year in school, major;
- Your skills/qualifications/coursework relevant to the industry or intended position;
- The company or organization's name and your interest in that organization, how you identified them, and/or if you were referred by another contact;
- Summary of your objective for an internship
- Duration
- The faculty member who will be advising you during your internship (if you are completing the internship for academic credit).
- Attach a recently updated resume

Inquiry Email Template:

*Note this is not intended to be a lengthy cover letter. It should be about one paragraph in length and include an attachment of your most up to date resume.

Your name and contact information at the top

Salutation

This greeting should address an individual by name (and may require web and LinkedIn research, or a call to the organization).

Background

This section should succinctly outline your understanding of the industry in which you are applying for the internship and give an outline of why you are interested in this field for internship work. In a brief paragraph, list significant and substantial experiences and educational opportunities you have had in the past or are currently engaged in that relate to your current major and your pursuit of a career in a related field.

Example:

My background in communication-related fields is derived mainly from my (list extra-curricular activities or previous experience on campus). I have had coursework in (list applicable coursework).

OR

My hands-on experience (note applicable experiences in internships, part-time employment and volunteer activities) lies primarily in the areas of (list applicable areas to this internship proposal).

Organizational Interest

Express your interest: why are you interested in interning at that *particular* organization? Note how you identified them, and/or if you were referred by another contact.



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Example:

After reading your website and seeing how diverse in clients and testing your company is, I was instantly drawn to it as I want to gain experience in this field and one day have pursue graduate studies in nuclear physics.

OR

After talking with Ronaldo Gutierrez at the SHPE Conference last April and hearing more about his role as a Plant Manager, I became interested in the work that XYZ Inc. is doing because it connects my two main interests: mechanical engineering and environmental sustainability.

Internship Objective

Summarize your thought-out learning goals into one sentence, what are you hoping to gain from this experience overall? If you plan to earn academic credit for this internship and would have an internship faculty supervisor, you could include that here.

Example:

I'm looking for an internship where I can contribute my organizational and planning skills and gain hands-on experience in nonprofit event planning and fundraising, as this interests me as a potential career path.

Availability and Duration

Include the minimum number of hours per week (or for total duration) that you are available to work during the entire internship period, as well as ideal start and end dates (even if only generally listed – i.e., spring). If you are flexible and/or willing to work remotely, mention that.

Example:

I am currently looking for an internship this summer; my schedule is flexible and could I work up to about 20 hours a week until the end of August.

OR

I am looking at arranging an internship for next semester and will have full availability on Tuesdays and Thursdays from January-April. I am located in Portland, however, could also intern remotely.

Closing

List your phone number and note that your resume is attached to the email (**don't forget to attach your updated resume to the email!**).

Example:

Attached is a copy of my resume. You can reach me at this email address, or by phone at (503)-123-4567. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
[YOUR NAME]

Finalizing Your Internship:

Once you have had a successful conversation with an organization that wants to hire you as an intern, formalize the agreement and expectations in writing. For details about a *quality* internship and position description, refer to the [Finding a Quality Internship](#) handout. If you are not earning academic credit for this internship, refer to the [Independent Internship Resource Guide](#) for guidelines about how to make the most of your experience!



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Additional resources:

- [The Right Way to Ask for an Internship in an Email \(With Examples!\)](#), The Muse
- For a comprehensive, innovative guide to this methodology of landing your dream internship, check out [Hacking the Internship Process](#), by Bill Hobbs and Zachary Schleien
- [Creating Internships Out of Thin Air](#), The Wall Street Journal
- [How to score an internship during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), The Conversation
- [3 Ways to Create Your Own Internship](#), Big Dream Gathering
- [How to Create Your Own Internship](#), Career Contessa

If you have questions, please contact:

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