

Field Experiences ... frequently asked questions about internships

What is a Field Experience?

Better known as an internship, a Field Experience is a professional opportunity for students to apply academic skills, build portfolios and professionally network in a productive setting with the support and supervision of a qualified professional. An internship should directly relate to a student's professional goals and aspirations.

Who can do an internship?

All School of Communication majors or minors qualify for an internship for credit if they:

1. Have at least a 2.5 cumulative GPA (although this requirement may be waived by the Field Experiences program director).
2. Have completed the 100-level courses in their major (although some internships do not require this).
3. Undertake a new (to the student) communication-related professional experience with the direction of a qualified professional.
4. Complete, and submit to the SoC Field Experiences director, the required form to apply for a permit to enroll in the appropriate section.

Where can I do an internship?

Students choose their internships. Like finding a job, it is up to the students to convince the internship supervisor (and providing organization) of the value of the experience AND the intern's ability to contribute to the organization's goals. Students should not immediately rule out big city opportunities due to location. There are several commuting options, the potential to live with roommates, and interns could discuss the matter with their internship supervisors to search for additional solutions. Explore all of your options before ruling out an exceptional opportunity because of its location.

How do I find an internship?

You are responsible for finding your own internship site, although the Field Experiences director maintains a database of possibilities. Known as the "Internship Log," that document contains listings from previous SoC student interns as well as opportunities from organizations contacting the SoC looking for interns. You can receive the latest copy by emailing the Field Experiences director at talamon@ilstu.edu or going to Field Experiences website at communication.illinoisstate.edu/careers/internshipsforstudents.shtml. Additionally, the Career Center hosts several internship and career fairs for students to explore potential opportunities. The Career Center calendar can be accessed at <http://careercenter.illinoisstate.edu/events/>. Students can also search for internship opportunities by creating an eRecruiting profile. eRecruiting is an interactive job vacancy bulletin that allows for students to search for positions and directly apply online. Students can take advantage of this opportunity and begin building their profiles at <http://careercenter.illinoisstate.edu/eRecruitingCareerCenter.shtm>.

How can I prepare myself for an internship interview?

Preparing for an interview takes time and research. Your first step is to research the company to gain a better perspective about the organization and the position you are applying for. Next, identify why you would be the best person for the position. Write down some of your qualifications, skills, and experiences so you are prepared to address them at the interview. The Career Center is a great resource to use when preparing for an interview. Students can schedule mock interviews, prepare answers for commonly asked questions, and browse through interviewing tips. All of this information can be found at <http://careercenter.illinoisstate.edu/students/interview/>. While researching is undoubtedly important, the number one rule to interviewing is to BE CONFIDENT!

Who is involved in my internship?

Here are the people involved and their relationships to the process:

1. intern, student ... a student in the School of Communication on Field Experience;
2. employer ... where the Field Experience takes place;

3. supervisor ... the student's supervisor where the Field Experience takes place;
4. coordinator ... Field Experience faculty coordinator in the School of Communication at Illinois State University.

Do many SoC students do internships?

Yes. Of the SoC students who went through graduation in May 2011 and May 2012, 80 percent had at least one internship for credit and 30 percent had at least two. Which group do YOU want to belong to when YOU graduate?

How many credits is an internship worth?

First internships for SoC students are almost always worth 3 credit hours. After successfully completing the first internship for credit, SoC students taking additional internships are allowed to register for as few as 1 credit hour to participate in the program. Illinois State University permits a maximum of 16 credit hours devoted to professional practice—which includes internships, directed projects and teaching assistantships.

How much time must I spend on my internship?

SoC interns must dedicate a minimum of 144 hours to their internship between the start of a term and the final day of that term. In 16-week semesters (Fall and Spring) this breaks down to 9 hours per week. In 12-week terms (Summer), this breaks down to 12 hours per week. Note that students are NOT required to log their internship time or submit time reports to the Field Experiences director ... however, most interns spend MORE than the required amount of time on their internships and as long as the intern and professional supervisor are satisfied with the quality and quantity of intern work, the Field Experiences program staff are likely to be satisfied.

How does being paid impact an internship?

From the standpoint of the Field Experiences program, compensation has no impact at all. Whether the intern is being paid or not has NO direct impact on the requirements or impact of the internship experience. Field Experiences staff DO NOT get involved, in any way, in compensation issues between interns and their supervisors.

I already work part-time in my field. Can I get internship credit for these hours?

Maybe. One of the requirements is that your internship experience be “new to you.” You cannot get internship credit for doing what you are already doing. You’ll need to take on new responsibilities or a new project to turn your existing job into a viable site for internship credit.

However, for example, a State Farm employee who is enrolled in the School of Communication CAN get credit for an internship at State Farm. The best way to do that is to find a “new” area of the company to gain experience and get a supervisor (NOT your regular employment supervisor) to agree to direct and mentor your internship. You might still be working at State Farm, but your internship experience is “new to you” and expands your networking and opportunities in the company.

Besides putting in the required number of hours, what else do I have to do to get internship credit?

A syllabus of learning experiences is emailed to interns at the start of the semester, outlining the responsibilities of both interns and their supervisors. Those responsibilities include reflective essays by the interns and evaluations (midterm and end-of-term) by the supervisors.

Are internships required in the SoC?

No student is required to do an internship. However, for most majors in the SoC, students' first internship for credit can substitute for a 200-level elective (consult your academic advisor to see if you qualify). Most SoC students do internships because they are valuable additions to resumes, portfolios and networking opportunities.

If internship is a class, does it meet?

No, not regularly and not in a classroom. The terms and conditions are generally like an on-line course. However, during the summer term, the Field Experiences director plans and schedules visits to many of the interns in an effort to network with students and supervisors, and learn more about your experience.

How are interns evaluated for the purpose of getting a grade?

Prospective interns should know that those who do the work they are asked to do, get reasonable evaluations and complete the academic assignments in a timely and professional manner are most likely to receive an “A” for their internship grades.

Interns are evaluated by their supervisors; however, final responsibility for grading falls on the faculty coordinator for that intern (see the Internship Form’s signature for “Faculty Coordinator.”)

How much does an internship cost?

Interns pay the same hourly tuition and fees rate as they do for other classes and, for students on financial aid, most financial aid will cover internships on the same basis as other course credit. Check with your financial aid advisor to make sure you are covered. Interns should also be mindful of additional costs such as commuting and other mundane spending that may arise while interning.

Last summer I had a great summer job related to my communication major. Can I take credit for it during the regular school year?

No. Credits must be taken during the semester in which the work is performed. Students must apply for, and enroll in, the appropriate section to receive credit during the semester the work is performed. Special arrangements CAN be made for internships performed during the break between Fall/Spring term for that internship to count in the Spring term—HOWEVER, arrangements must be completed prior to the start of the internship.

Does my internship have to be in or around campus?

No. In the summer, usually more than 50 percent of our interns are outside the area. Many are in Chicagoland, but we have had interns as far away as New York, Los Angeles, Europe, Asia and Australia.

What are some helpful tips for a successful internship?

1. Be professional ... dress for success, arrive early, stay late, be ahead of all deadlines, demonstrate a consistently strong work ethic.
2. Be proactive ... employers want employees who show initiative and a desire to learn and develop; going above and beyond just the “required” work shows you are serious about it.
3. Be focused ... when you are at your internship, you are at WORK. That means avoid texting, personal phone calls or other things which might distract you from performing professionally.
4. Be “big-picture” oriented ... the happiest and most successful interns are the ones who know they are contributing to their organization’s ability to reach its goals and achieve its bottom line.
5. Be appropriately inquisitive ... employers know you don’t have all the answers. When you are challenged, spend a little time trying to figure it out. If you cannot, then ask thoughtful questions which can help you achieve.
6. Be respectful ... treat others the way YOU want to be treated. Show appropriate professional deference--address co-workers courteously and don’t get caught up in office politics. Be careful about socializing with co-workers outside the job. Give respect and you have a chance to get some.
7. Be opportunistic... this is your chance to show that you have the knowledge and skills to be a successful asset to the company. If there is an extra project you are asked to work on, don’t hesitate! Your learning opportunities are endless.
8. Be responsible ... this is your job! You will be held accountable for your work. You want your fellow employees to TRUST that you will perform at your highest level.
9. Be intellectually sound ... you have college experience. Take what you have learned in the classroom and apply it to your work to create high quality results.
10. Be mature ... remember, some people refer to internships as “four-month job interviews.” It is a chance to build a portfolio, enhance professional skills and network. If you act maturely, you will represent yourself, the School of Communication and Illinois State University in a way that will benefit everyone—especially YOU!