

# Develop skills through experience

It doesn't matter what your major is, employers and graduate schools look for students who have experience. Why is this so important? It helps you build skills that are essential to professional success and apply them in different settings. The good news is there are lots of ways for you to build skills and experience in college.

## ✔ have you considered . . . ?

- ▶ **Working a part-time job** helps you demonstrate your work ethic, build workplace skills, and learn how organizations operate. Check [MSU.joinHandshake.com](#) for all the latest part-time job openings for you.
- ▶ **Volunteering** or getting involved in **service-learning** helps you make a difference in the community and learn how to work in diverse economic, social, and cultural environments. Go to [ServiceLearning.msu.edu](#) and [GiveGab.com](#).
- ▶ Doing **undergraduate research** helps you gain complex reasoning, problem-solving, and communication skills while building a mind for innovation. See [MSU.joinHandshake.com](#) for opportunities.
- ▶ Being an **active member or leader of a student organization** can help you gain project management, teamwork, and leadership skills. Check out over 500 student organizations on [StudentLife.msu.edu](#).
- ▶ **Serving as career fair ambassador** gives you behind-the-scenes insight into what employers are looking for in candidates and opportunities to broaden your professional contacts too. Search [Handshake for career fair ambassador opportunities](#) and sign up today!
- ▶ Experiences help *increase your competitiveness* for internships, fellowships, and cooperative education opportunities. To download a copy of the *12 Essentials for Success: Competencies Employers Seek in College Graduates*, go to [CareerNetwork.msu.edu](#) and click on "Career Guides" under the "Resources + Tools" tab.

## What is an internship?

### ▶ An internship is basically a learning experience outside of the classroom.

- Identified learning goals
- Supervisor emphasizes learning & mentoring
- Regular feedback and evaluation from supervisor
- Emphasis on professional development
- Emphasis on transferable skills
- The more you put into it, the more you get out of it!

## ✓ internships for every major !

Internships are challenging work opportunities related to your major or intended career that force you to reflect and integrate your college learning in the professional world.

According to MSU's Collegiate Employment Research Institute, students who intern earn 10% more over their lifetime than those who don't. Why the increase? **Current research indicates that internships today are equal to entry level jobs five years ago**, which gives students who have completed internships a competitive advantage in managing the pace and expectations of professional work.

More significant is the skills advantage interns develop through their experience. Quality internships focus on the critical skills new professionals need to be competitive in the workplace such as risk-taking, leadership, cooperation, critical thinking, and problem solving. Exactly what employers value most!

**Internships come in many shapes and sizes.** They also vary a lot between career fields and employers. Internships can be paid or unpaid, for-credit or not-for-credit, part-time or full-time, and they can be done at any time during the year, not just in the summer. Some academic programs, like engineering, offer cooperative education placements (co-ops) which are special partnerships between a student, an employer, and a college or university.

# MAKE MONEY AND CONNECTIONS.

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## ✓ finding internships

- ▶ Check out **CareerNetwork.msu.edu** under the “Jobs + Internships” tab for everything you need to get started.
- ▶ Use **Handshake** to search for internship positions, on-campus interviewing and career fairs. You can also “follow” employers you’re interested in working for to stay up to date on their events and opportunities.
- ▶ Consider an internship on or near campus during the school year.
- ▶ Meet with a Career Advisor or Career Consultant for your college to discuss and create an internship search plan that fits with your goals and interests.
- ▶ Identify employers of interest and contact them directly!
- ▶ See pages 50-59 for more on developing a search strategy.

## ✓ getting the most out of your internship

- ▶ **Set goals.** Before you begin, sit down with your supervisor and establish several realistic goals for your learning experience. Ask, “What results should I be working toward?” Use these goals to evaluate yourself throughout your experience.
- ▶ **Find a mentor.** If your employer does not provide you with someone who will coach you and answer your questions, seek out employees who will agree to serve in that role. Building quality professional relationships during your internship is vital to lifelong career success.
- ▶ **Take the initiative.** Some experiences are well-defined with specific outcomes provided, others are not. In either case, don’t sit back and wait! Your employer will be impressed when you see a problem or issue and address it. When you take ownership in your work, you’ll find it more rewarding.
- ▶ **Build relationships.** Learning about your chosen field can be an enjoyable experience. Connect with other students and employees both inside and outside of the work environment. Take it upon yourself to organize after-work social activities if they are not planned for you. Remember to show a strong work ethic throughout your experience, and you will be respected by those with whom you work.
- ▶ **Know your place.** You will be working with professionals who have many more years of experience in the field than you. Remember you do not have all the answers. Communicate respectfully to all employees—those with a college degree, and those without. At the same time, don’t be afraid to share your ideas. Sometimes a fresh perspective is just what your employer needs.

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