



# **INTERNSHIPS: A DETAILED OVERVIEW**

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# Introduction

Internships serve as a crucial bridge between academic knowledge and the professional skills necessary for career success. At Truman State University, we recognize the immense value that structured, real-world work experiences bring to our students, empowering them to apply classroom knowledge, develop professional competencies, and explore diverse career paths. This guide provides an in-depth overview of the internship landscape, covering both academic and non-academic internships, paid and unpaid opportunities, and various formats, including full-time, part-time, and virtual internships.

As you navigate this guide, you'll discover detailed explanations of each internship type, eligibility requirements, and associated benefits. Additionally, this resource offers insights into legal and compliance guidelines that protect both interns and employers, aligning with Truman's commitment to ensuring fair and equitable work experiences. The guide also addresses essential considerations for risk management and liability, reinforcing our priority to provide safe and productive environments for students embarking on these professional journeys.

Whether you're a student seeking hands-on experience, a faculty member supporting student career development, or an employer offering internship opportunities, this guide is designed to clarify each party's role in creating meaningful and impactful internships. By facilitating clear expectations and responsibilities, Truman's internship program aims to foster a supportive ecosystem that champions experiential learning, enhances employability, and builds a solid foundation for future success.

# What is an Internship?

An internship is a structured work experience offered by an employer to give students exposure to real-world professional environments related to their field of study or career interest. It serves as a bridge between academic coursework and practical application. Through internships, students can apply the theories and skills learned in the classroom, gain practical experience, develop professional abilities like communication and teamwork, build networks with industry professionals, and explore different career paths to determine if they align with personal and professional goals.

## Benefits of Internships

Internships offer numerous benefits, including career clarification by providing real-world insight into the day-to-day realities of a profession and helping you make informed decisions about your career path. They contribute to professional development by enhancing practical skills not taught in the classroom and teaching responsibility in managing tasks and meeting deadlines in a work environment. Internships also provide networking opportunities, allowing you to receive guidance from experienced professionals and potentially leading to job offers after graduation. Additionally, internships give you a competitive edge in the job market by building your résumé with relevant experience and providing professional references for job applications.

# Internships: A Detailed Overview

An internship is a structured, practical work experience where students or recent graduates gain hands-on exposure in a professional environment. Internships allow participants to apply their classroom knowledge in real-world scenarios, develop relevant skills, and explore career options. These experiences are usually aligned with the intern's field of study or career interest and can vary in format, duration, compensation, and level of responsibility.

Internships are generally classified into different types based on factors such as industry, purpose, duration, and compensation. Here's a closer look at various types of internships available:

## ACADEMIC VS. NON-ACADEMIC

### **Academic Credit Internships (For Credit)**

Academic credit internships are designed to allow students to earn credit toward their degree while gaining practical experience. These internships are often arranged through the university and involve meeting specific academic requirements, such as completing a certain number of work hours or submitting reflective assignments and progress reports. To receive credit, students may need to enroll in an internship course supervised by a faculty advisor who monitors their progress. This type of internship allows Truman students to satisfy degree requirements while developing career-related skills and building their professional network.

### **Co-operative Internships (Co-ops)**

Co-operative internships, or co-ops, involve alternating periods of full-time academic study and full-time work. For example, a student might study for a semester and then work full-time during the next semester, repeating this cycle throughout their academic program. Co-ops are typically paid and extend over several semesters, providing significant work experience before graduation. At Truman State University, co-ops are especially common in specific fields and may include specialized experiences like clinical placements for healthcare students or student teaching for education majors. These types of co-ops help students meet professional licensing or certification requirements while gaining hands-on experience in their chosen fields.

### **Non-Academic Internships**

Non-academic internships are work experiences that do not count toward academic credit but still offer valuable opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience in their chosen field. These internships allow students to explore career interests, build practical skills, and expand their professional network without the constraints of meeting academic requirements or deadlines. Non-academic internships can be particularly appealing to students who want to gain additional experience outside of their coursework or pursue fields where academic credit is less common, such as startups, creative industries, or freelance work. By participating in a non-academic internship, students can focus on developing industry-specific competencies and adapting to the demands of a real-world work environment. Additionally, these internships often have flexible schedules and requirements, making them an ideal option for students who need to balance other commitments, such as part-time jobs or extracurricular activities.

## PAID VS. UNPAID

### **Paid Internships**

Paid internships provide monetary compensation for the work students perform, typically through hourly wages or stipends. These internships are common in industries such as technology, finance, engineering, and marketing, where interns contribute significantly to projects and the company's operations. Paid internships not only help students cover living expenses but also motivate them to actively engage in their roles. The compensation often makes these opportunities more accessible to a broader range of students, regardless of their financial background. At Truman University, paid internships are valued for the real-world skills and industry connections they help students develop.

### **Unpaid Internships**

Unpaid internships, while offering no monetary compensation, still provide valuable experience, networking opportunities, and sometimes academic credit. They are commonly found in sectors such as non-profits, government, the arts, and social services, where budgets may be limited. Although students do not earn money, they gain first hand exposure to their chosen fields and often benefit from mentorship, skills development, and letters of recommendation. For many students at Truman University, unpaid internships are a gateway to unique fields or roles that might not be available through traditional paid internships.

## TYPES OF INTERNSHIPS

### **Summer Internships (most popular)**

Summer internships are typically short-term opportunities lasting 8-12 weeks during the summer break. These internships are the most popular among students because they take place when students are not attending classes, allowing them to focus solely on their work without academic distractions. Summer internships often include structured programs with training, mentoring, and project-based work, making them an excellent way for students to gain a comprehensive understanding of a field. Many companies use summer internships as a pipeline for future full-time hires, providing students with a potential pathway to employment after graduation.

### **Full-Time Internships**

Full-time internships involve working approximately 35-40 hours per week, similar to a standard job. These internships are more immersive and typically occur during the summer or immediately after graduation. Full-time internships offer in-depth exposure to the profession and often involve complex projects, team collaboration, and a higher level of responsibility. Students at Truman University who participate in full-time internships gain a comprehensive view of what a full-time role in their field would entail, helping them develop both technical and soft skills rapidly.

### **Part-Time Internships**

Part-time internships are structured to fit around a student's class schedule, usually requiring 10-20 hours of work per week. These internships are flexible, allowing students to gain practical experience while continuing their studies. Part-time internships are ideal for students who want to gradually enhance their skills and knowledge without overextending themselves during the academic year. At Truman University, part-time internships offer students the ability to balance their academic and professional development simultaneously.

### **Micro-Internships**

Micro-internships are short-term, project-based work experiences that typically last from a few days to a few weeks. Unlike traditional internships, they are highly flexible and allow students to engage in meaningful tasks without the commitment of a full-time or long-term internship. Micro-internships provide an opportunity to gain practical skills, build a resume, and explore different career paths in a condensed timeframe. They can be especially beneficial for students who want to gain experience between semesters, during breaks, or while balancing other commitments.

### **Virtual or Remote Internships**

Virtual or remote internships are conducted entirely online, allowing students to complete their tasks from any location. These internships have become more prevalent due to technological advancements and the growing flexibility they offer. Virtual internships can be part-time or full-time, paid or unpaid, and may involve tasks such as research, marketing, or project management. At Truman University, virtual internships are a valuable option for students who cannot relocate or have other commitments, providing flexibility and the opportunity to develop digital literacy and remote work skills.

# Legal and Compliance Guidelines

Internship programs must comply with several legal regulations to ensure that both students and employers are protected. This section provides an in-depth guide on how to navigate the legal landscape of internships, covering key areas such as paid vs. unpaid internships, risk management, and liability.

## Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

The U.S. Department of Labor's Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) governs the rules around unpaid internships, especially in for-profit organizations. Below is a step-by-step guide on how to ensure that your internship complies with FLSA regulations.

### Step 1: Understanding the Criteria for Unpaid Internships

For an internship to be unpaid in a for-profit company, it must meet the following criteria as outlined by the FLSA's "Primary Beneficiary Test." If the internship fails to meet these conditions, the intern must be paid at least minimum wage.

#### 1. The Internship Must Be Educational in Nature

The primary focus of the internship must be on the intern's learning experience, rather than on the company's immediate business needs. The intern should be learning skills that will benefit them in future employment, rather than performing routine tasks that directly benefit the company.

- **Educational Focus:** Interns should be working on projects or tasks that are similar to training provided in an educational environment, like those found in college classrooms or labs.
- **Skill Development:** The intern should be developing new skills and gaining valuable insights into their field of study.

**Example:** An unpaid marketing intern should be learning how to develop marketing campaigns, analyze customer data, or create social media strategies. They should not be spending most of their time on administrative tasks like photocopying or answering phones.

#### 2. The Internship Must Benefit the Intern, Not the Employer

The intern should be the primary beneficiary of the experience, gaining skills, knowledge, and professional development. The employer may benefit indirectly from the intern's contributions, but the intern's learning and development should be the primary focus.

- **Supervision and Mentorship:** The internship should involve supervision and mentorship from experienced professionals who guide the intern's learning experience.

**Tip:** Employers should view unpaid internships as opportunities to mentor and develop future professionals, rather than as a source of free labor.

#### 3. The Intern Must Not Displace Regular Employees

Unpaid interns should not be used to perform tasks that would otherwise be completed by paid employees. If an intern is replacing a regular employee or performing the work of someone on leave, they should be compensated for their time.



- **Complementing, Not Replacing:** Interns should be working alongside regular employees, complementing their work by contributing to projects that enhance their learning experience.
4. **There Must Be No Expectation of Employment at the End of the Internship**  
 The internship should not come with an implicit or explicit promise of future employment. While many internships lead to job offers after graduation, this should not be an expected outcome. The internship is primarily a learning experience, not a trial period for employment.
- **Clear Communication:** Employers should clearly communicate at the start of the internship that there is no guarantee of future employment.
5. **The Intern and the Employer Must Understand That the Internship is Unpaid**  
 Both the intern and the employer must have a clear understanding that the internship will be unpaid. This agreement should be documented in the internship contract and signed by both parties.

**Note:** If these criteria are not met, the intern must be paid at least the federal minimum wage (or higher, depending on the state or local minimum wage laws).

## Step 2: Determining Whether the Internship Should Be Paid

If the internship does not meet the FLSA criteria for unpaid internships, then the employer is required to pay the intern. Here's how to determine if the internship should be paid:

### 1. For-Profit Organizations

Internships at for-profit organizations are more likely to be paid, as unpaid internships must meet the strict criteria outlined in the FLSA. If the intern's work is directly benefiting the company or displacing a paid employee, the intern must be compensated.

### 2. Non-Profit Organizations and Government Agencies

Internships at non-profit organizations and government agencies have more flexibility when it comes to unpaid internships. These internships often qualify as unpaid under FLSA because the primary focus is on education and public service.

- **Non-Profit Internships:** Many non-profit organizations offer unpaid internships as a way to provide students with experience while benefiting a charitable cause. However, the same focus on learning and mentorship applies.
- **Government Internships:** Internships with government agencies may also be unpaid, as they are considered public service opportunities.

## Step 3: Paid Internships

For paid internships, employers must follow all applicable labor laws regarding wages, hours, and working conditions. Here's what employers and students need to know about paid internships:

### 1. Minimum Wage and Overtime Pay

Paid interns must receive at least the minimum wage for the state or locality in which they are working. If the intern works more than 40 hours per week, they are entitled to overtime pay.

- **Hourly Wage:** Ensure that the intern's wage meets or exceeds the federal, state, or local minimum wage. In some states, the minimum wage is higher than the federal requirement.

- **Overtime:** If the intern works more than 40 hours in a week, they must be paid overtime at a rate of at least 1.5 times their regular hourly wage.

## 2. Work Hours and Breaks

Paid interns are entitled to the same protections regarding work hours and breaks as regular employees. This includes meal and rest breaks, as mandated by state law.

- **Tracking Hours:** Employers should track the intern's hours carefully to ensure they are complying with wage and hour laws.

## 3. Benefits

While interns are generally not entitled to benefits like health insurance or paid leave, employers may offer these benefits voluntarily. However, it's important to clarify what, if any, benefits are offered at the start of the internship.

### Step 4: Academic Credit and Internships

Some internships may offer academic credit as compensation instead of (or in addition to) pay. Here's what students and employers need to know about internships for academic credit:

#### 1. Eligibility for Credit-Bearing Internships

To qualify for academic credit, internships must meet specific educational criteria. These internships should be directly related to the student's field of study and offer meaningful, educational experiences that enhance their academic learning.

- **Learning Contract:** Students must create a learning contract with their faculty advisor and employer that outlines the educational goals and objectives of the internship.
- **Academic Assignments:** Credit-bearing internships typically require students to complete academic assignments, such as reflective essays, reports, or presentations, in addition to their work for the employer.

#### 2. Balancing Credit and Compensation

Interns can receive both academic credit and monetary compensation for the same internship, as long as the internship meets the criteria for both. However, unpaid internships for academic credit must still comply with FLSA regulations to ensure that the intern's primary benefit is educational.

- **Internships Abroad:** If an internship takes place abroad, additional considerations for academic credit and compensation may apply. Students should work closely with the university's internship office to ensure compliance with both local and international regulations.

## Risk Management and Liability

Internships come with inherent risks, both for students and employers. This section outlines how to manage risk and protect all parties involved in the internship program.

### Step 1: Insurance Coverage for Students

Truman State University provides general liability insurance coverage for students participating in approved internships. This coverage protects students in the event of injury or accidents while on the job. Here's what students and employers need to know about insurance coverage:

#### 1. General Liability Insurance

Truman's general liability insurance provides coverage for students who are injured or cause injury to others during their internship. This coverage is automatic for students participating in approved internships through the university.

- **How It Works:** If a student is injured during their internship or causes damage to property, Truman's liability insurance will cover the costs associated with the incident, provided the internship is part of an approved academic program.

#### 2. Workers' Compensation

Paid interns are often eligible for workers' compensation through the employer, depending on state laws. Workers' compensation provides financial support for interns who are injured on the job.

- **Employer's Responsibility:** Employers must check whether their state requires paid interns to be covered by workers' compensation insurance and ensure compliance. This coverage is separate from Truman's liability insurance.

### Step 2: Internship Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)

To ensure clarity and protect all parties, internships should be formalized through an internship agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This document outlines the responsibilities and expectations of the student, employer, and university.

#### 1. Drafting the Internship Agreement

The internship agreement or MOU should include the following components:

- **Intern's Role:** A clear description of the intern's duties and responsibilities, as well as the expected learning outcomes.
- **Compensation:** Whether the internship is paid or unpaid, and if unpaid, the reasons for this (e.g., compliance with FLSA, academic credit).
- **Work Hours:** The expected work schedule, including start and end dates, weekly hours, and any breaks or leave.
- **Supervision:** The name and contact information of the intern's supervisor or mentor, along with expectations for regular check-ins and evaluations.

#### 2. Signatures

Once the agreement is drafted, it must be signed by the student, employer, and university representative (typically the internship office or faculty advisor). This formalizes the arrangement and ensures that all parties understand their roles and responsibilities.

## Conclusion

The Truman State University Internship Guide aims to equip students, faculty, and employers with a clear understanding of the structure, requirements, and benefits of internships. By offering a variety of internship types and formats, from academic credit internships to non-academic, paid, and virtual options, the program supports students in gaining hands-on experience that bridges the gap between academic study and professional growth.

Through collaboration among all parties, adherence to legal and compliance standards, and a focus on risk management, Truman's internship program prioritizes safe, fair, and enriching experiences. Internships serve not only as a valuable step in career development but also as a platform for students to build confidence, develop essential skills, and expand their professional networks.

As students complete these internships, they emerge with practical knowledge, industry insights, and a competitive edge in their career journey. Truman State University remains committed to fostering experiential learning that complements academic achievement and prepares students for a successful transition into their chosen fields.