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Getting the Internship

By Gina Prows and Trace Lund



Internships can be a great opportunity to explore potential areas of interest, make meaningful connections, and gain experience in the workplace. However, even the market for internships can be competitive. Here we present some relevant questions answered by our community of internship hiring professionals from several organizations. These contributing organizations offer internship experiences in a variety of fields and range in location from on-campus to out-of-state. We're confident that their insight will be an extremely valuable resource to psychology undergraduates and recent graduates hoping to take advantage of some unique opportunities in the internship world.

Question 1

Sometimes students are unable to obtain an internship or job because they don't have the right kind of experience. What kind of work can a student do independently to stand out as a competitive applicant for an internship?

L. Campbell: Students should have volunteer experience of some kind. It shows they have served in some capacity in high school, in their community, or church. Many times it is not necessary to have experience in the same field, but just show you have been willing to serve. You can also express how willing you are to work with a certain population.

S. Duncan: Applicants should have excellent writing and library research skills, and ability to work well alone.

J. Kennedy: If an internship specifically requires graduate-level education and work, you may be out of luck.

What we're looking for is someone who has gone above and beyond just going to class. Stand-out applicants have founded or held leadership roles in clubs or non-profits, worked any job (even at the cafeteria!) while going to class, volunteered for non-profit organizations, or conducted research projects. I had an applicant once whose only extracurricular activity was her soccer club, but she had been treasurer and led fundraisers for that club. That's the kind of initiative I want to see.

S. Larsen: It is helpful if students have applicable volunteer time in a similar environment, or work life experiences/passion in the field or study courses that related to the type of careers they are seeking. This shows an interest in developing the experience into a career choice. We want our program to enhance the person's background and course of study.

M. Russon: In today's day and age, you absolutely have to be able to effectively use computers. The basics like Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. We also like to see evidence of good drive and motivation. We can't teach that like we can other skills, so it's nice to see that an applicant already has that from past experiences.

A. Viveiros: They should have a good GPA, a motivating purpose for wanting to intern with our agency (i.e. wanting the experience of working with relationship assessments because they hope to work with couples as a career, etc.), and have taken courses in our field of study.

Question 2

What are some specific factors that can make a potential intern more appealing? Are there certain qualities that may deter you from hiring someone?

L. Campbell: The most appealing factor to us is someone who has a game plan. When someone comes in and says, "We just want to hang out with the kids," that is an automatic red flag. We want self-motivated individuals who have energy and new ideas. We want someone who wants to try new things. It is a fine line because you don't know what things you are allowed to do. If you are too pushy or aggressive, that can be bad also. Basically, be enthusiastic about some of the things you are studying and sharing that knowledge.

S. Duncan: I like to see excellent writing and research skills and a strong work ethic as noted by references.

J. Kennedy: The most appealing factor for any potential intern is passion. I can teach an intern just about everything she or he needs to do the work – but I can't make her or him want to be here. If you are enthusiastic and responsible, you'll do well. Being a strong writer definitely helps.

I tend to be more forgiving than my co-workers in hiring interns – I'll let it slide if you didn't research on our organization before the interview (even though you should have!). To me, it's a rookie mistake and a teachable moment. But I'm very wary about potential candidates who seem like they need a lot of handholding. If you call me to ask if we have any internships without checking our website or if you call and e-mail repeatedly about a position, it makes me worry that you are going to require a lot more work.

S. Larsen: Students need to follow the instructions for applying for the position. I request a current resume and cover letter asking the intern to articulate their interest in the position, their career objectives and availability. Those that stand out are those that fulfill the requirements. I also look at good sentence structure, spelling and general content in the cover letter. Some of the behaviors I like to see from the student are demonstrated dependability and commitment to a project, activity or class.

M. Russon: You need to be able to multi-task. We consistently have a lot of things that need to be done, and we need someone who can handle that. You also should be a self-starter; someone who can see a problem and can just have the drive to go fix it rather than needing to be told to do it. A prevalent negative quality is simply a bad attitude. A bad attitude will keep you out of a lot of opportunities. You should be professional and helpful or you won't find much success.

A. Viveiros: Motivation is key. I can tell if the student is wanting to intern with us because they want to versus wanting to intern with us because they have to.

Question 3

What types of responsibilities should potential interns be expecting? How do interns fit into your organization's overall structure?

L. Campbell: Interns can expect as much responsibility as they are willing to take on. Interns need to know

what the job will be like. They should get "real life" experience when possible. We will never leave interns alone with youth, but we do expect interns to run groups, teach classes, and create new programs. In our programs, we hire interns for staff, because we know how they perform.

S. Duncan: Forever Families is a web-based family life education site. Students are responsible to write 1-2 sets of articles for the site and/or revise existing ones. Their titles are research assistant. They also give feedback on the overall needs of the site.

J. Kennedy: For our organization, interns should expect a range of work. I like to split time between big projects that boost an intern's portfolio and help our organization (like writing our Annual Report), getting interns hands-on experience in software they'll need for the workplace (Excel, donor databases, accounting software), and then some mundane but necessary work – taking a day every month to make paper records electronic. I've also learned that interns really seem to love shredding documents for some reason.

Interns fit well into our organization structure. We invite them to staff and department meetings and have special intern-only lunches once a week with seminar. We really like "teaching moments" here, and we appreciate what they bring and their enthusiasm for learning. But that really depends on the internship – there are some industries where all you will do is grunt work, but you'll love it anyway just to get your foot in the door.

S. Larsen: We use our interns to assist employees in all aspects of the job. They may begin by observing and then move into a more supporting roles such as entering information, taking minutes, leading a project. Generally we don't expect the intern to do the work but be learning the responsibilities. We have great respect for our interns and depend on them to help with children and parents. They fulfill an important role for us.

M. Russon: In the school system it's always changing, so you should be prepared for a variety of responsibilities.

A. Viveiros: We have several areas in our agency where we need the help of interns: translating our assessments into difference languages, helping with research projects, interpreting results to couples who have completed one of our assessments, and so on. We are always in need of interns and customize our internships to cater the individual's needs.

Question 4

Can you share any common pitfalls or general advice that potential applicants should be aware of?

L. Campbell: Applicants should be brave. Have confidence, be sure that they can handle the assignment, then make sure you understand what is expected. Many times interns feel they have failed because their responsibilities were never made known to them. You should be able to own your internship as much as possible, and not be micromanaged.

S. Duncan: You need to enjoy writing, write well, and work well flexibly without a lot of supervision.

J. Kennedy: For your application, make sure your cover letter is specific to the organization you're applying to! Don't just send me a generic letter that says "Dear Madam, please see attached my resume for your consideration." I want you to want this position at this organization. Make sure that your resume and cover letter are error-free and easy to read.

For the interview, make sure you read up about the organization enough to answer the basic question, "Why do you want to intern here?" In general, you should prepare for interviews. Phone interviews are especially difficult because it's hard to know when you're not interrupting when you can't see someone's body language. The trick is to be relaxed enough that you sound confident and poised but not so relaxed you say something you'd say to a friend and not an employer. It takes a lot of practice to get there.

Interviews are really the trickiest part of the job search. What I tell people is that any candidate who makes it to the interview stage is capable.

S. Larsen: Resumes and cover letters need to be professional and error-free. Time schedules have to match our needs.

M. Russon: Complaining is a pitfall to be aware of. We work in a positive environment where we need to get things done when problems arise. Complaining doesn't help.

A. Viveiros: Social skills are important. Make sure you seem interested and self-motivated. Don't come in looking confused, unprepared or unmotivated to do the in-

ternship.

Question 5

What tools or resources could students be aware of in their pursuit of an internship?

L. Campbell: Be sure to find out about the company you are contacting. Have knowledge of what kinds of internships are available, be sure you contact the proper person in charge, be persistent, and follow through with what is asked.

S. Duncan: FHSS Internship office on 9th floor of the SWKT. Go there first.

J. Kennedy: You can do mock interviews at school or look up questions on the Internet and practice saying them out loud. The career center at your university is a great place to start. I like some of the information on www.internships.com – the blogs in particular can be really great. Also, if you know what field you want to work in, you should start reading the top blogs in that field.

Don't tell your parents I said this, but be wary of some of their advice; some candidates make poor decisions based on outdated parental advice. I see parents tell their children to show up in person and hand deliver a printed resume with no appointment, show up 30 minutes early for an interview, and call every 3 days to check on the position. I think that used to be the way to show enthusiasm, but it actually stresses me out. I don't like to worry about you waiting at the receptionist desk because I had a meeting. E-mail is the preferred method of communication.

S. Larsen: Classes on how to write a resume that is compelling. Be able to express interest and reasons for seeking the internship besides it being a requirement!

M. Russon: There are a lot of opportunities in the Provo area that will help a student be well rounded. That can really help.

Many thanks to the following interview contributors: Linda Campbell of the Department of Youth Corrections (Springville, UT), Dr. Stephen Duncan with Forever Families (BYU), Jessica Kennedy of Mental Health America (Alexandria, Virginia), Susan Larsen with Kids on the Move (Orem, UT), Mary Russon with the Provo School District (Provo, UT) and Abby Viveiros of RELATE Institute (BYU). We

welcome you to contact any of these people directly. Their contact information, as well other current internship listings, is available in the BYU psychology internship office, 1007 SWKT. You can also contact the office by e-mail at psychinternship@byu.edu.

2012 SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Call for submissions for the Winter 2012 issue of
Intuition: BYU Undergraduate Journal of Psychology

Submissions must adhere to the following guidelines:

- The author (or first author) must be an undergraduate student at a BYU campus during the time he or she wrote the submitted work.
- Articles submitted for publication cannot have been accepted for publication elsewhere.
- Articles must be at least 1,000 words in length and must conform to APA style.
- An electronic copy of all articles must be submitted (see below for further directions). Preferred format for the electronic copy is Microsoft Word. All graphics or photos must be of high resolution (300 dpi).

Types of submissions

- Brief and extended reports of theoretical development or original research (or both). We accept submissions from any field of study in psychology.
- Creative works (visual media for potential cover art, and personal narratives related to research experience).
- Topical reviews, book reviews, and essays (reviews must be of recent publication and noteworthy).

Important Information

- Submissions are accepted and processed year-round. Submission deadlines may be found on our website, intuition.byu.edu.
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