



Virtual Internships: Adapting to the “New Normal”

Some industries were early adopters of the “virtual internship,” but for many, the idea is brand new -- and now a necessity in the “new normal” of the COVID-19 crisis. The situation has prompted many organizations to take a step back and think about either creating a whole new virtual internship program or morphing their current on-site internships into remote experiences.

What is a Virtual Internship?

A virtual internship (VI) simply defined is an internship experience done entirely via email, online chat, or phone. Both onsite and virtual internships allow students to obtain work experience in their chosen fields while applying skills and knowledge learned. VIs account for social distancing rules and allow for a more mobile opportunity without requiring valuable physical space in your organization.

Benefits of a Virtual Internship

All internships provide students the opportunity to experience the workplace world and apply what they have learned at college. And for employers, internships create a pipeline of future employees. But VIs also offer the following:

- The intern’s geographic location is not a factor.
- VIs eliminate the need for office space and some tangible resources.
- Interns with laptops are agile and mobile. They can work varying hours and from any location as long as the schedule and location meet with company policies.

What should I think about when creating a virtual internship?

Create a strong foundation for your VI program

Programmatic Considerations

- If you are not already managing the internship program, it is important to establish a reporting structure and train an internship coordinator/supervisor on mentoring best practices.
- Work with the university to get your internship posted through [UNLV Handshake](#).
- Consider conducting online pre-assessments, surveys, and interviews to determine if a virtual experience would be a good choice for a given intern.
- Define expectations for all parties involved.

- Determine the best software and programs for conducting and managing work. Check with your IT department to see what interns will need to make their base of operation efficient and their internship successful. Some software/programs to consider:
 - Project Management Tools
 - Video Conference Tools
 - Time Tracking software
- Develop training programs for staff and interns to train on the new software and systems.
- Develop training programs to talk about the best practices for virtual meetings, emails, shared spaces, security, and privacy concerns.
- Develop a work plan for the intern, including training materials and real-world activities to build practical experience. Ask yourself what projects will benefit from a fresh set of eyes.
- Develop a strong communication plan. Communication is KEY to a successful internship for both the company and the intern.
- Create an onboarding handbook for interns.

Note: It is important that prospective interns speak with their College or Department Internship Coordinator or the Career Services Office to ensure that they have the proper permissions in place to accept the internship for academic credit.

Other Considerations

A successful internship is one where interns are integrated into the work of the team and where other employees care about helping the intern succeed. This is especially important in the virtual setting. Communication is critical!

- Establish a one-on-one relationship with the internship coordinator/supervisor
- If time permits, have the intern virtually meet with other interns, employees, and leadership. This will help them feel more comfortable and convey that they are part of the bigger picture.
- Create personalized online training plans with input from the intern. Interns should have the opportunity to set some of their own objectives.
- Introduce them on your social media platforms.
- Establish goals and milestones.
- Provide a mid-program check-in with leadership.
- Assign an end-of-program presentation on accomplishments.
- Include interns in any online meetings or gatherings.
- Consider onboarding mentors and individuals who will assist the internship coordinator/supervisor within the first couple of weeks to ensure that the intern is acclimated to the company and understands what is required of them.
- Initially, schedule several check-ins during the day for the first couple of weeks. After the first couple of weeks, check-ins can be addressed on a case-by-case basis. However, at the very least, ensure regular contact is established to discuss next projects and feedback after the initial several weeks. Remember communication is key.

Ending on a High Note

Making interns feel connected to the company and its people in the virtual setting is very important and should be a theme throughout the entire internship experience.

- Say goodbye and acknowledge interns for their good work. This can be done on a one-on-one basis and on social media. Consider having a virtual going-away party for them.
- Conduct exit interviews or surveys.
- Provide feedback on the overall experience and allow the intern to provide feedback as well. This feedback could help to improve the program or specific materials or projects connected to the internship experience.

If you have any questions, please contact the UNLV Career Services Office at careerservices@unlv.edu or 702-895-3495.