



## Effective Internship Practices<sup>1</sup>

As you approach your Connecting Experience internship, it is important to set the conditions for a meaningful and mutually beneficial collaboration with your internship host. Following are some strategies for ensuring that you *and* your internship host benefit from your Connecting Experience.

**Recognize that effective interning starts with the interview.** If a potential internship host requests an interview, prepare to demonstrate that you've done your homework and are familiar with the projects and programming of the organization or business. Be prepared to answer basic interview questions (Why do you want this internship? What is your greatest strength/weakness?). Visit your Career Services Office for support preparing for an interview.<sup>2</sup>

**Approach your work with the internship host in a spirit of generosity.**

While it is important that you have a clear idea of what you hope to gain from your internship experience (in terms of skills, knowledge, and professional exposure, for example), it is also essential to consider how the organization or business might benefit from your time there. In the course of completing the paperwork for your Connecting Experience (including the Internship Contract and Internship Sponsor Form), you will establish goals and expectations with your internship host. Think carefully about what you bring to the internship host, and offer specific ideas for how your skills and talents might be applied to advance particular projects and programs.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **This resource was developed in collaboration with the Bernard and Audre Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice at UT-Austin.** The author is grateful for the input of Rebecca Lorins, Ph.D., Program Director of the Texas After Violence Project (<http://www.texasafterviolence.org/>), and BDP Advisor Christine Anderson.

<sup>2</sup> See the Liberal Arts Career Services website for information on interview preparation: <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/orgs/lacs/Students/Coaching/InterviewQuestions.php>.

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion of how interns and internship hosts can plan and execute a successful working relationship, see Paula Mathieu's chapter "Students in the Streets" in *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 2005) and Virginia Raymond's "Bridging community & academia in the struggle to end violence against Latin@s" (University of Texas: 19 February 2010. [http://www.virginiaraymond.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Bridging\\_Community\\_and\\_Academia.Virginia\\_Marie\\_Raymond\\_February\\_2010\\_Outline.pdf](http://www.virginiaraymond.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Bridging_Community_and_Academia.Virginia_Marie_Raymond_February_2010_Outline.pdf)).

Once you begin your internship, **take on clerical tasks willingly.** Especially in the non-profit world, *everybody* stuffs envelopes and enters data at some point. Recognize that seemingly unglamorous clerical work is vital to the operation of an organization and an important part of the overall mission. While you should enjoy working on meaningful, substantive projects during your internship, you should also expect to spend some time working on administrative tasks.

**Be a hinge between the campus and the community with which you are working during your internship.** Invite your internship supervisor and colleagues to campus events that pertain to the projects you're working on. Keep them apprised of campus happenings that might interest them, such as performances, special exhibitions, and meetings of campus organizations. Alert them to potentially relevant campus resources such as archives and centers of regional and cultural study.

**Seek mentorship.** Recognizing that your internship supervisor has a lot of demands on his or her time, ask whether it might be possible to schedule periodic debriefing meetings to check in, reflect, discuss concerns or challenges, brainstorm ideas for improving your performance, and consider the implications of your internship experience for your future career.

**Reflect.** Keep a journal or blog. Regularly reflecting on your experience will enable you get the most out of your experience by helping you to gain valuable insights *as* you intern (rather than after the fact), which can lead to improved final outcomes of the projects you're working on. Sustained reflection is crucial for understanding the significance of your experience, including on-site challenges and benefits in terms of moral and professional development. If it would help motivate you to reflect regularly, consider asking your faculty mentor or internship supervisor whether you can e-mail him or her a reflective paragraph every week or two.

**Share your experience.** Have the confidence to reflect critically on your internship experience. If you are having a particularly exceptional experience, let your BDP advisor know so that future potential interns can benefit from your perspective. Your advisor is also available to discuss any concerns or difficulties you may have in the course of your internship. Take advantage of the opportunity represented by the Reflection Essay to share the specifics of your experience.

**Find ways to acknowledge your internship host and overall internship experience as you advance in your academic and professional career.** For example, did your internship experience influence your choice of a senior thesis topic? Did information or scholarly sources you encountered during your internship find their way into a research project you worked on subsequently? Include a footnote giving credit to the individual or organization that supported you.

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