

4



The Value of an Internship Experience for Early Career Geographers

R. Denise Blanchard, Mark L. Carter, Robert B. Kent,
Christopher A. Badurek

INTRODUCTION

Broadly speaking, an internship is a work-related learning experience that introduces you as a student or recent graduate to the work environment associated with your academic education, training, and interests. An internship provides you with an opportunity to build your résumé of professional work experience, form alliances and networks in the areas of your specialization, and grasp how your coursework is preparing you to enter your chosen field.

Internships are offered in a host of career tracks, including medicine, architecture, science, engineering, law, business, and technology (The Princeton Review 2005; Liang 2006; Pollak 2007; Wise et al. 2009; Baird 2010). They may be found in private companies, nonprofit organizations (e.g., charities, environmental stewardship organizations, and research institutes), and at all levels of government. A student majoring or minoring in geography will find internships in all the subfields of geography, including geospatial technologies; environmental geography and related areas; community and regional planning; geographic education; business geography; and transportation geography, to name a few.

The goal of this chapter is to provide you with information on all the various aspects of an internship: the value of an internship for getting your career off to a good start; types and sources of internships in geography that will complement your academic studies; how to locate a suitable internship; how to maximize your internship experience; and ways for you to reflect upon and evaluate your internship experience. Internships are becoming increasingly attractive to prospective employers; for you, an internship will increase your skills, choices, and opportunities in the job market after your graduation.

THE VALUE OF AN INTERNSHIP

An internship is usually a temporary assignment of approximately three months to a year that serves as a bridge between your educational experience and future employment. Typically, internships involve work in a professional setting under the supervision and monitoring of practicing professionals. They may be paid or unpaid and/or taken for academic credit or non-credit. Internships offer structured educational experiences that incorporate productive work as a regular part of undergraduate and graduate curricula (COS n.d.). Specifically, an internship experience can help you:

1. determine whether your choice of an academic major and minor will translate into a meaningful career;
2. assess whether a particular industry is the best career option for you to pursue;
3. gain practical work experience related to your career goals;
4. assist you in building a record of work experience for your résumé;
5. provide you with a network of professionals who might eventually be of assistance in helping you obtain an entry-level position; and
6. offer you college credit for experiential learning.

Thus, the overall value of an internship experience is that it will provide you with opportunities to learn the roles, expectations, and behaviors of a workplace setting, and in doing so, allow you to test your strengths, interests, and problem-solving skills while acquiring valuable knowledge and contacts from associating with professionals. Table 4.1 summarizes the benefits of an internship experience for geography majors, minors, and graduate students, although the list applies to other disciplines as well.

TABLE 4.1 The Value of an Internship Experience for Geography Majors and Minors

As an intern, you will be able to:

- Obtain knowledge about the skills and abilities required for your chosen career direction.
- Apply the concepts and knowledge gained in academic classes.
- Acquire new professional skills
- Apply interpersonal/communications skills.
- Be more motivated toward your academic studies.
- Assess whether or not your academic program satisfies your expectations and goals that you have for your future career.
- Acquire a network of professional contacts.
- Understand the importance of roles, expectations, and behaviors in a workplace setting.
- Gain confidence in your abilities.
- Discern whether or not the agency or organization would be a good fit for you.
- Build and/or enhance your resume.
- Enhance your graduate school application, if you chose to continue to that level.
- Potentially receive an offer for an entry-level position.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNSHIPS FOR EARLY CAREER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN GEOGRAPHY

You Majored in What?

In pursuing geography as your major, you can expect to face challenges that are not experienced by better-known majors such as business, medicine, and engineering. Internships prove to be exceptionally valuable in overcoming these challenges. First, geography and the role of geographers are often not well understood outside of the discipline. In her 2009 book, *You Majored in What? Mapping Your Path from Chaos to Career*, Katharine Brooks writes that when students reveal their academic majors to family and friends, ultimately THE QUESTION arises: “What are you going to do with that?” The growing number of internship opportunities available, and the increased demand for them by geography students, serve to allay apprehensions of parents and students. It sends a positive message that geography is a viable career direction with copious job opportunities.

Second, the breadth and depth of geography as a field provides myriad potential career directions. Brooks explains that the “trait and factor” logic behind THE QUESTION—which assumes a linear path between major and career—is outdated. In the early 1900s vocational researchers thought that the best way to advise for career choices was to match people’s interests and skills (traits) to a range of possible vocations (factors). Today, college students often take courses and choose majors out of personal interest, not necessarily because of a specific career plan. In addition, as Curran and Greenwald (2006, xiv) write, “so much depends on interests, talent, personality—and luck.” By taking advantage of an internship opportunity related to your interests within geography, or better yet, even more than one internship experience, you can think nonlinearly about the various career options that geography has to offer and, thus, discern the most advantageous and compatible career direction within your interests.

Finally, the internship experience will not only assist you in adapting the “ideal” of what geographers do, but may also help employers understand the value that a geographer brings to the workplace, such as how skills and knowledge of spatial analysis can enhance understanding and decision making. Brooks (2009) points out that most employers are not familiar with the college-level study of geography, with their last memory being perhaps of a geography class in grade school that included memorizing all the states in alphabetical order. Employers may not know that a geography major takes a very interdisciplinary course of study with roots in the physical sciences as well as the social sciences, and that it equips students with skills and perspectives related to geographic information science, teaching, environmental management, urban planning, and many other areas.

Check out William Shubert’s profile to see how an internship supported the professional development of one early career geographer.

THE BENEFIT OF DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS

In many cases, the world of professional planners, GIS professionals, and environmental professionals is rather small. This is particularly the case within a short radius of your academic institution or within your home state. Given this reality, internship opportunities provide you with an excellent opportunity to enter the working world by helping you make key contacts in your industry in three primary ways: through (1) having a facilitator such as your direct internship supervisor, or the hiring manager of the agency; (2) attending professional development functions in your industry (Sabatino 2011b); and (3) becoming a participant in relevant alumni professional organizations (Vogt 2009).

PROFILE 4.1

William Shubert, International Editions Coordinator, *National Geographic Magazine* (Washington, DC)

William Shubert describes his work at *National Geographic Magazine* as doing whatever he is asked to help prepare over two dozen local language editions of the iconic publication for distribution each month. A former intern, William now works as International Editions Coordinator, a job that entails a diverse and ever-changing set of responsibilities. He might be asked to write an article explaining how paleontologists determined that dinosaurs were multicolored before helping translators convey that same information in a multitude of languages, all in 200 words or fewer. Then it's a phone call to the Embassy of Madagascar for assistance in transliterating place-names, followed by some head-scratching to figure out how to explain "hanging ten" [the surfing term] to a Chinese audience. Factor in his emerging role as the magazine's Social Media Coordinator and a Halloween jaunt along the National Mall dressed in a Lycra zebra suit (at the behest of his editor), and one quickly gets the sense that there is nothing typical about William's typical workweek.



In a nutshell, William's job entails understanding how other cultures interpret American media.

A native of San Diego, he received his bachelor's degree in 2010 from Humboldt State University in northern California. He points out that it's not the basic facts and the "cool slides" presented in his classes that have best served him in his professional endeavors, but the **global perspective** he acquired as a geography major. William credits his studies with providing fodder for the imagination, facilitating his ability to process patterns, and enabling him to **communicate effectively** in multiple modes, such as texts, maps, oral presentations, photos, and graphics—all of which directly support the mission of *National Geographic Magazine*. But he considers his international travels, including a year spent in China working a variety of jobs, as the best preparation he received for his role as a cross-cultural communicator. "Going to China forced me to go back to zero," William explains. "I thought I learned a lot in my geography and Chinese classes, but I quickly realized I knew nothing." Personally **experiencing different ways of life** showed him that the ability to distill and convey ideas across cultural and linguistic boundaries is more important than mastering the fundamentals of a particular language or the place-name geography of a particular region. This understanding of how information can be literally lost in translation has provided William with a solid foundation for working in international media.

So, how do you get a job like William's? Like many early career geographers, he got his foot in the door as an intern. "Unlike many corporate internship programs, the purpose of our program is not necessarily to be a stepping stone to hiring at National Geographic, although it can be," explains Geography Intern Program Manager Karen Gibbs. "The objective is to further our goals in geographic literacy by providing opportunities to geography majors to **experience a work environment** in which a knowledge of geography is important. An intern, in return, brings to his or her division a geographic perspective in day-to-day operations." The program is highly competitive, so successful applicants must submit their materials on time, clearly articulate their interests, and describe their career preparation, such as other internships and job experience. [For more information or to apply, visit www.nationalgeographic.com/jobs and look for the "Geography Intern" posting. Applications are reviewed once per year, in October.]

Although his name now appears on the magazine's masthead, William's initial application to the Geography Internship Program was rejected. Realizing that "not being good enough at the time doesn't mean you're not good enough ever," he pursued his interests and enhanced his professional portfolio through his travels, successfully reapplying from China the following year. William cites this experience as his biggest lesson learned: not withering in the face of adversity, but continuing to refine his skills in pursuit of his goals.

—JOY ADAMS

First, internship supervisors serve as effective mentors by supplementing what you have learned in the classroom with on-the-job knowledge that can only be gained through years of work experience. In addition, internship supervisors assist you in transitioning to the workforce by serving as a key contact or professional reference when other opportunities arise. Internship supervisors who are “connectors” in their industry (i.e., those who have many professional contacts or who serve as leaders in their field or professional organizations) may provide you with leads and entry to the most attractive opportunities. Thus, the choice of an internship location as well as the influence of your supervisor will play an important role in determining how effective your internship experience will be for providing access to industry networks. In some cases, students have pointed to particular supervisors who directly helped place them in compatible and enjoyable jobs (Sabatino 2011b).

Second, some internship supervisors, particularly those with a planning focus, will often bring their students to professional meetings where they may network with other professionals. Some supervisors may personally introduce you to other professionals, or it may be up to you to make use of the networking opportunity by engaging other professionals in conversation.

Third, alumni networks associated with your industry or department are useful in helping you find an internship, as well as in building your network after completion of your internship. For example, local government and GIS professional organizations frequently have meetings or networking events in which job or internship opportunities may be discussed (Sabatino 2011b).

Finally, through your internship, you will become actively engaged in professional organizations, resulting in greater opportunities for you to select internship positions and find permanent employment. In addition, an increasing number of professional and alumni organizations are using Web 2.0 applications such as LinkedIn and Facebook to build connections, strengthen networks, and manage the flow of information on employment and networking opportunities. These websites provide an opportunity for you to network virtually through e-mail exchanges and message board discussions (Cross and Parker 2004). In particular, LinkedIn provides access to online groups dedicated to very specific industries and the applied subareas of geography, including planning, sustainability, GIS, renewable energy, and environmental management (Gralla and Widman 2008; Sabatino 2011a).

TYPES OF INTERNSHIPS FOR THE MAJOR SUBFIELDS OF GEOGRAPHY

Internship opportunities that specifically ask for a geographer per se are not typical. If you are majoring or minoring in geography, you will discover that organizations and agencies do establish and offer internship experiences for a variety of “geography-type” positions, for example: urban planning/community development; cartography; GIS; climatology; transportation management; environmental/conservation management; professional writing/research; public information and outreach; emergency management; demography; marketing; information science; National Parks Service; and real estate. These positions may be further categorized in the major subfields of applied geography: (1) Environmental Geography; (2) Urban Planning/Community Development/Land Use Management and Regulation; (3) Geospatial Technologies; (4) Geography Education; and (5) Business Geography, Real Estate, and Location Analysis, and are the subfields where the majority of geography students seek internships. Each of these subfields will be discussed next, with examples of the jobs that interns would be observing for possible future employment (Boehm and Peters 2008).

ENVIRONMENTAL GEOGRAPHY

Environmental geography is a branch of geography that examines the spatial aspects of interactions between humans and the natural world. If you are majoring in environmental geography you might be specializing in biogeography, geomorphology, hydrology, or meteorology.

Other common areas of specialization include environmental/conservation management and assessment, hazards, and sustainable development. Your internship might involve work that calls for you to assist park rangers, environmental investigators, conservation specialists, or environmental policy specialists. Table 4.2 lists examples of internship opportunities from the website “Environmental Career Opportunities.” Websites such as CampusAccess.com, ecojobs.com, and eco.org also will provide you with listings of environmental internships and careers.

TABLE 4.2 Types of Internships in Environmental Geography and Related Fields

Examples of Internship Titles

Marketing/Social Media Intern
 Grassroots Internship
 Environmental Education and Animal Behavior Internship
 Environmental Video Transfer/Archivist
 Animal Care Internship
 Education Intern
 Green Internship—Environmental Research
 Communication and Marketing Internship
 Field Internship
 Public Lands Internship
 Environmental Arts Internship
 Education and Outreach Internship
 Communications/Media Interns
 Campaign Research/Development Assistant
 Environmental Education and Public Outreach Intern
 Sustainable Living Internships
 Special Events/Marketing Intern
 Resident Intern
 Media Relations Intern
 Educator Internship
 Legislative Intern
 Public Relations and Communications Internship
 Communications and Social Media Intern
 Summer Naturalist Interns
 Journal Assistant
 Environmental Education Summer Intern
 Government Affairs Intern
 Policy and Legislative Affairs Internship
 Climate Summer Internship
 Spring Outdoor Environmental Education Intern
 Energy Fellow
 Summer Naturalists
 Wildlife Rehabilitation Internships

TABLE 4.3 Types of Internships in Community and Regional Planning, Land Use Management, and Regulation

Examples of Internship Titles

Private Land Development Intern
 Real Estate Intern
 Commercial Real Estate Location Analyst Intern
 Municipal Government Planning Intern
 Code Enforcement Intern
 Neighborhood Planning Intern
 County/State Government Planning Intern
 Municipal Government Zoning Intern
 Community Development Block Grant Intern
 Public Housing Authority Planning Intern
 Community Education Outreach Intern
 University Facilities Planning Intern
 Transportation planning intern
 GIS Planning Intern
 Surveying Intern

COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING, LAND USE MANAGEMENT, AND REGULATION

In addition to fostering a sense of place for a geographic location, planners with backgrounds in geography are also aware of spatial relationships and patterns that both define a community and influence its various capacities, including housing, business development, public health and safety, disaster management, transportation, and recreation. Planning internship opportunities may be found at all levels of government, as well as in global corporations, architectural firms, and other businesses. Table 4.3 lists types of internships if you have a career interest in these subfields.

GEOSPATIAL TECHNOLOGIES

Geospatial technologies comprise the fastest growing area of geography, and include geographic information systems (GIS), Global Positioning Systems (GPS), and remote sensing, all powerful tools used to store, analyze, visualize, and present spatial information. Together with appropriate cartographic techniques and principles, geographers are using geospatial technologies to better understand the interactions of various factors across space, including population distributions, traffic movement, land use and availability, environmental hazards, soil types, and vegetative cover. Any phenomena that can be tied to a geographic location (georeferenced) may be analyzed spatially, which means that geospatial tools can (and often should) be used in every aspect of the practice of geography. If you are specializing in areas of geospatial techniques, you are positioned comfortably for internships and jobs well beyond the traditional bounds of the discipline.

Internships as well as career and job opportunities in geospatial technology are available in both the public and private sectors, in fields ranging from environmental conservation to resource speculation to health and safety administration, computer science, resource management, and

TABLE 4.4 Types of Internships in Geospatial Technologies**Examples of Internship Titles**

Public Sector GIS Interns—various titles at the local, county, state, and federal level
 Private Sector GIS Interns—various titles
 Land Development Intern
 Map Analyst Intern
 Floodplain Mapping Intern
 Satellite Imagery Analyst Intern
 GPS Technician Intern
 Cartography/Map Design Intern
 Facilities Infrastructure Inventory/Management Intern

education. Government agencies at local, state, and national levels are among the largest providers of internships for students trained in geospatial technologies. Table 4.4 lists internship titles that may be of interest to you in these career fields; however, the list is by no means exhaustive.

GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION

Geography education extends beyond the boundary of teaching in a classroom setting. Museums, nonprofit organizations, and government/quasi-government agencies seek interns to assist in developing, implementing, and conducting public outreach programs, educational seminars, and workshops as well as in making contributions to educational policy at the local, state, and national levels. For example, as an intern, you might assist an education specialist working for a government agency charged with the general supervision, maintenance, facilitation, and development of age/grade-level-appropriate programs that comply with educational standards. Table 4.5 lists some of the internship opportunities to consider if you enjoy teaching in informal venues.

TABLE 4.5 Types of Internships in Geographic Education**Examples of Internship Titles**

Museum Curator Intern
 Museum Tour Guide
 Visitor Assistance
 Historical Preservation Intern
 Event Presenter or Speaker
 Environmental Education Intern
 Education Conference/Workshop Intern
 Writer for Environmental Education Materials
 Developer of Geography Education Materials
 Geography Teacher (informal setting)
 Media Intern
 Research Assistant Intern

TABLE 4.6 Types of Internships in Business Geography, Real Estate, and Location Analysis

Internship Titles

Location Analysis Intern
 Real Estate Development Intern
 Business/Economic Development Intern
 Shopping Center Development/Management Intern
 Aerial Photography Interpretation Intern
 Mapping Intern
 Demography/Population Geography intern
 Communication Network Intern
 Global Trade Intern
 Municipal Facilities Research Intern

BUSINESS GEOGRAPHY, REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT, AND LOCATION ANALYSIS

Geographers are increasingly in demand in the business community because of their abilities to synthesize spatially diverse information, to uncover spatial patterns, and to solve spatial problems using 21st-century geospatial technological tools such as GIS, GPS, and remote sensing. If you are pursuing business geography/real estate/location analysis, then you are learning the importance of location and spatial distribution of economic activities. Your focus may be on the spatial dynamics of trade, transportation, migration, capital flows, and communication networks.

By majoring or minoring in business geography, you will obtain diverse knowledge and skills related to location analysis. Combined with geospatial tools, you, in your internship, will play a key role in a vast array of decisions for the public and private sectors, such as the placement of municipal utilities, corporate headquarters, or transportation routes. You can also hone your reasoning and evaluative abilities, as well as apply quantitative, qualitative, and geospatial tools for decision making. In addition, your knowledge of cultural geography will help you land internships related to trade, policy, law, and business relations. Table 4.6 lists internship opportunities to consider if you are interested in business geography, real estate/economic development, and location analysis.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHOOSING AN INTERNSHIP

The “Right” Internship

Finding and choosing the “right” internship is important. If you are seeking an internship, you should begin by asking yourself: “Just what are my career goals?” Perhaps the most important question that you, as a prospective intern, might ask is: “What kind of work do I want to pursue as a career after I complete my university degree program?” While it is usually difficult to answer this question, it is a crucial exercise. At the very least, it helps to provide you with some personal guidelines about the kind of position as well as the employment sector where you should begin your internship experience—and, you should follow your instincts and interests as much as possible in this regard. Professional careers may last decades and often endure for the balance of

your working life; thus, choosing the right internship will have a major impact on launching your career properly. The bottom line is this: first and foremost, choose an internship that complements your professional and career interests.

In general, you should take a number of considerations into account when deciding on which internship opportunity to pursue. For many, the number one concern is whether the internship is paid or unpaid.

Paid or Unpaid?

All things being equal, it would seem at face value that paid internships are more valuable than unpaid ones. All things are not always equal, however, and it may be that an unpaid internship will be far more useful than a paid one. For instance, a paid internship in an industry or employment category that is not one in which you see potential for a career, is essentially no better than a part-time job flipping burgers in a fast-food joint. It pays, but it brings you no closer to advancing your career. Similarly, even an internship in a business or government agency that fits your career and professional goals may not be very meaningful if your duties are mostly photocopying, data entry, answering the phone all day, and other repetitive and unchallenging tasks. In general, an unpaid internship that is: (1) professional and career-oriented, (2) exposes you to a dynamic work environment, and (3) includes challenging and intellectually demanding work related to your field of study will likely be a far better choice than the paid internship that does not provide these advantages, or does so in far lesser measure than the unpaid alternative. Because many internship experiences last only one semester, accepting an unpaid internship in your junior year of university study could later qualify you for a paid internship during the summer or the next academic year when you are a senior or in a graduate program. So it is useful to bear in mind that in some circumstances, the benefits of an unpaid internship, even in the short run, may far outweigh the benefits of the paid alternative.

In addition, the focus on being paid may be a short-sighted concern when you are weighing the benefits of potential internship opportunities. For example, paid internships in distant locations often carry large costs related to housing and transportation to the internship site. When considering the financial aspects of an internship, don't forget that if you live in a rented apartment close to your college or university, or at home with your parents, it may be better to pursue an unpaid internship. In addition, if you pursue an internship in your hometown, you may be a preferred applicant by many potential agencies that seek to provide opportunities for students from the local community. If distance is not a concern, organizations such as the Student Conservation Association (SCA 2011) provide access to many internship opportunities for students by brokering internships at sites such as the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the United States Forest Service. You might receive low pay or a small stipend for your duties, but this will be balanced by free housing or perhaps reimbursement for travel to the internship site. Internships found through SCA are popular with geography students because they sometimes focus on outdoor data collection duties in exotic locales.

WHAT KIND OF WORK IS OFFERED?

Another common concern that you might have is the nature of the work involved in an internship, such as the trade-off between indoor and outdoor duties and the amount of analytic work. Many students, particularly those with strong interest in physical geography, tend to look for internship opportunities that involve gathering field data, collecting GPS points on natural

features, or engaging in physical activities related to stream restoration or trail maintenance. However, these positions may limit opportunities to engage in professional activities such as data management, spatial and environmental analysis, and contributions to final reports. You may also experience the opposite at office internship settings where the entire experience may be limited to data entry or tasks such as digitizing GIS data or georeferencing scanned photographs or historic documents. In this case, you may be engaged in a work experience in a more “professional setting,” but you will also want to look for opportunities to develop the critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills that many professional organizations have argued are needed for meeting the demands of the GIS/IT and applied geography workforce (NRC 2006, UCGIS 2006). Appropriate mentoring at the internship site and some variety in duties is a key aspect for you to consider in selecting an internship to maximize your educational and professional development according to your own particular interests.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO PURSUE AN INTERNSHIP?

A third major consideration is the timing of your internship placement. Generally, students may engage in internships for credit or not for credit at any time in their academic career. However, employers generally prefer to have interns with a set of skills and abilities that will enable them to perform work helpful to the organization. Since most geography undergraduate students begin taking higher level courses in their junior year, most internships that require full- or half-time work commitments would be conducted during the summers after your junior year, after your senior year in some instances, or during a graduate program. For example, some academic institutions encourage students to pursue an internship experience at the end of their senior year because they then have the highest levels of skills and knowledge to be effective at the job site. This timing also might help you more easily make the transition from your student environment to life in the workforce. In some cases, it may also help you procure a full-time job at the internship site. In many instances, employers will “try-out” summer interns to gauge their skills and abilities and potential contributions as employees before offering full-time employment. However, employment is not always a guarantee—many agencies may explicitly state that they do not hire interns after completion of the assignment.

FOR COURSE CREDIT OR NOT? ADVANTAGES OF AN INTERNSHIP FOR ACADEMIC CREDIT

Though uncommon, some internship sponsors may require that you be registered in an internship-for-credit program. You may certainly look into pursuing and performing an internship on your own, but you should also consider the following advantages to enrolling in an academic for-credit internship course:

1. An internship course counts for credit toward your degree and graduation (for example, for three credit hours).
2. Other than agreed upon meetings with your internship coordinator, there are no class meetings required for an internship. Furthermore, you and your sponsoring organization’s supervisor determine working hours and schedule.
3. An internship “course” is a great line on your official college transcript; it adds credibility to your experience.
4. You will have priority assistance in finding an internship from your internship coordinator.

5. Your internship experience has accountability. You are getting graded by both your internship supervisor (performance evaluation) and internship coordinator (instructor of record).
6. To make a habit of recording and documenting what you do at work, you will probably be required to keep a daily work-log and prepare an assessment report on your own. This can help you become more self-motivated and responsible.

HOW TO LOCATE AN INTERNSHIP—SEARCH WIDELY

Because geography is a vast field, the range of possible internships is also large, yet the number of internships that might include the word *geography* or one of its derivatives in its title is decidedly limited. This is in no way a serious impediment to geography students successfully landing excellent internship opportunities. Government agencies, businesses, and nonprofits seek interns under a wide range of job titles. It will behoove you to be aware that, while the title may not invoke *geography*, geographers have many skills and intellectual perspectives that allow them to fill these positions. In seeking an internship, you should read job postings and advertisements carefully, realizing that the word *geographer* or *geography* will rarely appear—pay special attention to the description of duties and skills required. It is often here that you can identify good internship prospects that may be good career builders.

THE SEARCH PROCESS

So, how to begin? First, whether or not you are one of the lucky ones whose department provides assistance in the internship search, you need to accept the fact that a good search means you will have to “put yourself out there.” You will need to find your courage, put on your thick skin, and prepare to be insistent and patient at the same time. At times you will need to be a bit aggressive about pursuing opportunities and getting your name and résumé in front of potential internship sponsors. It is also important to realize that, while looking for an internship is much like looking for a job, it is also distinctly different in many ways. A significant difference emanates from the fact that many are not formally advertised and, instead, are filled through informal networks. In any case, a search for an internship may be facilitated through careful review of job boards (e.g., www.indeed.com; www.monster.com); websites for governments, businesses, and nonprofits; and employment announcements. In addition, some large corporations, government agencies, and even professional associations may sponsor internship programs and actively seek student applicants throughout the year. In these cases, enrollment in a specific course of study or at least in an approved university-level internship course may be required.

Many internships, however, are not filled through advertisements or postings on websites. They are filled through formal and informal inquiries and contacts. This is where you cannot be too bashful. Even from the beginning of your internship search, you should pursue and cultivate informal and formal means of landing a position. Talk with your professors and fellow students, tell them what kind of an internship you are seeking, and ask if they have any suggestions. Professors often know local individuals and organizations that use interns and may be able to suggest where to start. Your fellow students may not have the same breadth of contact with professionals, but still may be knowledgeable about local internship opportunities or may simply have some useful suggestions for where to look. You may also want to talk with your parents, their friends, and your relatives about your career plans and your search for an internship. These individuals may work in the same employment sector that interests you, or know someone who does.

“Cold calling”—that is, simply picking up the telephone and calling without any kind of introduction or prior contact—or simply showing up unannounced at a government office, business, or nonprofit might also work. Some students do obtain an internship this way; however, it is not easy, and not for the faint-of-heart. In most cases, rather than a cold call or an unannounced visit, it is probably best to use an incremental approach. Once you have determined where you would like to work as an intern, try to identify the professionals in the office or department that interests you. Send them a brief e-mail identifying yourself, the university you attend, your major, and your academic and professional interests and goals. Attach a résumé.

If you are fortunate, you will be in a department or college where faculty and staff have a long tradition of sponsoring internships and who have a broad network of local contacts to draw on. In these cases, the internship program serves as a clearinghouse bringing students together with those in businesses, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations seeking interns. There may be a full- or part-time faculty member or a member of the professional staff who serves as an internship coordinator. These individuals have a wealth of knowledge and can often facilitate your internship search.

BE PROACTIVE

A proactive approach to finding an internship, as described by Richard Nelson Bolles in his seminal career-planning guide, *What Color Is Your Parachute?*, begins with determining your career goals, then researching organizations in which people have similar career goals, and finally, finding and connecting to those people with personal inquiries, informational interviewing, job shadowing, and networking strategies. Internships that you obtain proactively by establishing professional relationships with potential internship sponsors tend to be the most satisfying and successful experiences.

Starting places for you to research internship-sponsoring organizations include alumni directories, career fairs, archived job descriptions, and keyword searches on the Internet. You should also utilize campus Career Services Department staff to help identify potential internship-sponsoring organizations. Table 4.7 lists a variety of ideas for locating internship opportunities.

TABLE 4.7 Sources of Internship Opportunities

Departmental alumni. Many obtained their start as interns themselves and often will send a request to a geography department for an intern.
Public, private, and nonprofit organizations that have previously had success with hiring students as interns or somehow heard about a particular department, often will send the department a request for an intern.
Recurring “contract internships” with other state agencies.
Recurring state and federally managed internship programs.
Recurring on-campus internship opportunities.
Searching on the Internet for posted internship opportunities.
The result of a student inquiry/informational interview.
The result of a successful <i>job shadowing</i> experience.
Family member, friend, or other “network.”
A chance opportunity (“the right place at the right time”). Be prepared to take advantage of serendipity.

Students are often insecure about their qualifications or skills that they might need for an internship. Although sponsors often look for specific skills and abilities, they generally want to hire interns that are thoughtful, intelligent, and hardworking, and who bring an enthusiasm and willingness to learn to the position. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of communicating your enthusiasm and interest when seeking an internship.

DUTIES AND EXPECTATIONS: LAYING THE GROUND RULES

It is important to get a clear idea of your internship duties. Keep in mind that written internship descriptions may be vague or general, and it is sometimes the case that your internship sponsor is not altogether clear on how your duties might evolve. Nevertheless, when the opportunity arises—when interviewing for the position, or later if the internship is offered to you—you should make every effort to clarify what will be expected of you. Potential misunderstandings and problems can often be avoided through a written agreement signed by you and the sponsoring agency that spells out your responsibilities. If your internship is to be used as part of a formal *for-credit* experience, then the faculty supervisor should also be included as a participant and signatory of this agreement.

MAXIMIZING THE VALUE OF YOUR INTERNSHIP DURING AND AFTER THE PROGRAM

Upon accepting and beginning an internship, you should make a point to keep track of your work accomplishments and time spent interacting with your internship supervisor and other staff. In addition, always conduct yourself with a professional work ethic and build rapport with your internship supervisor and co-workers. Often students do not consider the effort it takes by employees to supervise interns. In many cases, supervising interns is an additional duty performed by busy professionals who may or may not have volunteered for the duty. Those employees who seek out or volunteer to supervise you often do so out of interest in assisting fellow university alumni, developing young professionals in their industry, or assisting their organization by providing outreach opportunities and/or completing work tasks. In addition to expected professionalism, you should assist your supervisor by being respectful and patient with receiving duties and feedback on performance.

Keep in mind that you are receiving the latest training in technology and states of knowledge in your field and that not all employees may be as knowledgeable about GIS and IT or be as passionate about their current position as you are. If you feel that you might be doing more advanced-level work, supervisors often appreciate a proactive approach where you have delivered products or work relevant and useful to the organization that was not directly supervised. For example, GIS and cartography interns are often capable of creating many kinds of maps or performing analyses that may be useful to organizations without having been guided directly to complete these tasks. A student who waits around to be told what to do by supervisors usually reports greater dissatisfaction with his or her internship experience than a more actively engaged and proactive intern.

Build a good relationship with your supervisor and co-workers by demonstrating a positive attitude and good work ethic. Many employers have reported that they would much prefer a pleasant, enthusiastic intern with good technical skills to an exceptionally skilled student with an unpleasant demeanor.

You may also enhance your internship satisfaction by focusing on developing your skills in teamwork, project management, leadership, and verbal communication in addition to your technical practice while on the job. Table 4.8 provides important tips for ensuring that your internship is a successful experience.

TABLE 4.8 Keys to Student Intern Success on the Job

Be professional.
 Be respectful and patient.
 Be proactive.
 Give some value to the organization.
 Be mentored.
 Help your internship supervisor.
 Practice soft skills as well as academic skills.
 Reflect on duties and experience often.
 Keep track of progress and accomplishments.
 Create a professional portfolio or other evidence of work practice.
 Build connections and a network.

EVALUATING AND REFLECTING ON YOUR INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

By regularly logging your work tasks, accomplishments, and other tangible evidence of success while on the job as well as by keeping maps, graphics, planning documents, or other products created in a professional portfolio, you will ultimately be able to evaluate and reflect upon your experience. You will also be able to provide your faculty/staff supervisor with a record of your performance. In addition, a summary letter of performance or evaluation check sheet should be solicited from the internship supervisor prior to completing your exit interview. This evaluation will provide you with valuable feedback on strong points and areas of improvement, though in practice most supervisors tend to limit negative feedback in written documents. See the profile of Mark Barnes for an example of how reflecting on an internship experience can clarify one's professional interests.

If you are taking an internship for academic credit, you may receive feedback on your internship performance from your internship coordinator through e-mail communication, site visits, commentary on your final portfolio, or in the form of a debriefing on any discussion between your internship supervisor and faculty/staff supervisor. Table 4.9 presents questions that you might

TABLE 4.9 Reflecting and Reporting on Your Internship Experiences

What were your basic duties?
 Did you enjoy the work?
 Did you enjoy the area/region/environment you were working in?
 Did you handle any important assignments that were not part of your basic duties?
 Do you have a better understanding of what kind of work you'd like to do after graduation?
 Did the internship meet your expectations?
 Did the internship help you develop work skills in written/oral communication, responsibility, leadership, work ethic, time management, teamwork, and taking direction?
 Do you think the internship helped you prepare for work after your graduation?
 Would you like to work for this organization?
 Would you like to work in a similar position somewhere else?

PROFILE 4.2

Mark Barnes, Eagleton Governor’s Executive Fellow, 2010 and Ph.D. Candidate, Rutgers University (Piscataway, NJ)

Internships have been described as a “try before you buy” opportunity (Coco 2000), a chance to experience—and to gain experience from—an organization, position, job sector, or workplace without a long-term commitment. For Mark Barnes, a semester-long public sector internship played a pivotal role in helping him to decide on a future faculty career.

Mark received his bachelor’s degree in geography and planning from West Chester University and his master’s degree in urban studies from Temple University. He also gained valuable experience in the **applied aspects** of community development as an intern and employee with several organizations in Philadelphia. After enrolling in the Ph.D. program in geography at Rutgers University, Mark began considering a career in higher education but remained interested in urban issues and community-based organizations. On the advice of his dissertation adviser, he applied for the Eagleton Fellows Program as an “opportunity to step back and **gain another perspective** on politics.” Rutgers students from any discipline are eligible for the fellowships, provided they have an interest in politics and government. Following a fall seminar, the fellows work part-time with a government agency or office during the spring semester.

Mark is writing his dissertation on the development of policies to address the impacts of snow events on urban transportation systems, particularly as climate change increases the vulnerability of cities to weather-related hazards. Based on his previous employment and his research interests, he was assigned to the New York/New Jersey Port Authority’s Environmental Policy Division for his fellowship. While his duties focused more on climate change mitigation and carbon emissions reductions than on hazards, he met with policy makers and observed political processes at the state level, complementing his knowledge of municipal government and enhancing his political acumen. He also **gained firsthand knowledge** of state agencies, their objectives, and the challenges they face in funding transportation projects.

For prospective interns and fellows, Mark advises, “At the doctoral level, an intern has to **be mindful of fit** and be certain that the time is well-spent.” He recommends that students seek placements that are relevant to their research topic. Whenever possible, he suggests that interns work with their colleagues to develop a project that connects to their academic interests and that they **identify a “champion”** within the organization who will serve as their mentor.

Looking back on his internship, Mark observes that perhaps the most valuable outcome was the realization that he wanted to pursue an academic career. Since returning to school, he had not done applied work for five years. His fellowship experience revealed that his “sensibilities have changed” during the time he has spent as a Ph.D. student and adjunct instructor. Mark still describes community economic development as his passion and says he hasn’t totally rejected the possibility of a career in government someday, but the return to the “9 to 5 daily grind” reminded him of why he decided to return to school in the first place: “I now know what I don’t want to do!” he states. In Mark’s case, “trying before buying” reaffirmed his love of teaching, the flexibility of the academic lifestyle, and his interactions with students, placing him squarely on the path to the tenure track.



—JOY ADAMS

consider when reflecting back on your experience. These questions might also serve as the basis of a final internship report to your internship coordinator. Basically, your report should cover: (1) your basic duties; (2) what you learned and gained from the experience; (3) any important or significant assignments that you handled; (4) a description of your work environment; (5) a discussion of your successes, as well as what and how you might have improved on your work; and (6) any final observations and comments.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Dr. Katharine Hansen (2010), creative director and associate publisher of *Quintessential Careers*, writes that the most valuable aspect of an internship experience is that it solves the “how-can-I-get-experience-if-I-have-no-experience” dilemma. Furthermore, in a 2008 survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)—a leading source of information about the employment of college graduates—95 percent of employers said that candidate experience is the most important factor in hiring decisions; nearly half preferred that the applicant’s experience be generated from internships or co-op programs prior to graduation. Dr. Marilyn Macke, executive director of NACE, notes that hiring from intern programs has increased steadily since 2007. In a 2011 NACE *Internship and Co-op Survey* of 266 member employing organizations, Macke found that internships are an integral and ever-important part of the college recruiting scene and that employers expect to increase internship hiring by about another 7 percent over the year. Approximately 40 percent of their new college hires for 2011 were expected to come from internship and co-op programs, thus demonstrating the central role that experiential education plays in the overall college recruiting process (NACE 2011). Thus, an internship can be a win-win situation for you and your sponsor—you benefit by gaining valuable work experience as well as a deeper understanding of your major field of study, while your internship sponsor is able to observe your performance within their organization.

Once you have completed an internship and formed professional bonds with your supervisor and co-workers, stay in contact with them and other professionals through e-mail, contact at professional meetings, or online social networking sites, even after you have secured your first job. One never knows when professional contacts might be helpful for future job positions or collaborating on projects (Cross 2009).

Also, consider pursuing more than one internship, especially if your first experience did not meet your expectations. Use the internship experience to test-drive your career path. You may find that one niche in your specialization is a better fit than another. Alternatively, you might be interested in combining your knowledge of one geography subfield with another. For instance, if you are focusing on geospatial technologies, you might do an internship with a planning department of a major metropolitan area to gain experience using geospatial technologies for various urban planning projects.

Finally, if it seems to you that you face insurmountable obstacles to doing an internship, such as having to work part- or full-time to pay for your tuition and living expenses, find a way around these obstacles by talking to your school counselors, internship coordinators, professors, and family members so that you are able to take advantage of at least one internship opportunity before you graduate. Do some creative thinking about how to seize an opportunity—it’s that important for your career.

REFERENCES

- Baird, B. N. 2010. *Internships, practicum, and field placement handbook*, 6th ed. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Boehm, R. G., and S. Peters. 2008. *Careers/jobs in geography: Business cards of department graduates*. Texas State University-San Marcos: Department of Geography, Grosvenor Center for Geographic Education.
- Bolles, R. N. 2010. *What color is your parachute? A practical manual for job-hunters and career changers*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- Brooks, K. 2009. *You majored in what? Mapping your path from chaos to career*. New York: Viking Press.
- Coco, Malcolm. 2000. Internships: A try before you buy arrangement. *S. A. M. Advanced Management Journal* 65, no. 2: 41-44. COS. College of the Sequoias, Visalia, CA. Internship website. <http://cosinternship.net/> (last accessed 5 January 2011).
- Cross, R. 2009. *Grad expectations: The essential guide for all graduates entering the workforce*. Penryn, Cornwall, England, U.K.: Ecademy Press Ltd.
- Cross, R. L., and A. Parker. 2004. *The hidden power of social networks: Understanding how work really gets done in organizations*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Curran, S. J., and S. Greenwald. 2006. *Smart moves for liberal arts grads: Finding a path to your perfect career*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- Gralla, P., and J. Widman. 2008. Facebook vs. LinkedIn: Which is better for professional networking, job hunting, and collaboration? http://www.cio.com/article/193402/Facebook_vs_LinkedIn_Which_is_Better_for_Professional_Networking_Job_Hunting_and_Collaboration_ (last accessed 26 May 2011).
- Hansen, K. 2010. College students: You simply must do an internship (Better yet: multiple internships)! *Quintessential Careers*. http://www.quintcareers.com/internship_importance.html (last accessed 24 May 2011).
- Liang, J. 2005. Hello real world! *Student's approach to great internships, co-ops, and entry-level positions*. BookSurge, a DBA of On-Demand Publishing, LLC. www.booksurge.com.
- National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). 2011. Internship and co-op survey: Research brief, 2011. http://www.nacweb.org/Research/Intern_Co-op/2011_Internship___Co-op_Survey___Research_Brief.aspx (last accessed 25 May 2011).
- National Research Council (NRC). 2006. *Beyond mapping: Meeting national needs through enhanced geographic information science*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- Pollak, L. 2007. *Getting from college to career: 90 things to do before joining the real world*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Sabatino, C. 2011a. Online networking for professional and personal development. *Intern Coach*. <http://interncoach.wordpress.com/2011/01/03/online-networking-for-professional-and-personal-development/> (last accessed 26 May 2011).
- Sabatino, C. 2011b. Professional associations for professional development. *Intern Coach*. <http://interncoach.wordpress.com/2011/01/03/professional-associations-for-professional-development/> (last accessed 26 May 2011).
- SCA. Student Conservation Agency. 2011. *Conservation internships, student conservation association*. <http://www.thesca.org/serve/internships> (last accessed 8 January 2011).
- The Princeton Review. 2005. *The internship bible*, 10th edition (career guides). www.RandomHouse.com.
- UCGIS. The University Consortium for Geographic Information Science. 2006. *Geographic information science and technology body of knowledge*. Washington, DC: AAG.
- Vogt, P. 2009. Which internship is best for you? *Monster College*. <http://college.monster.com/education/articles/68-which-internship-is-best-for-you?page=1>
- Wise, C. C., S. Hamadeh, and M. Oldman. 2009. *The Vault guide to top internships, 2009 edition*. New York: Vault, Inc., Vault Career Library.