

Internship Program Guide



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Introduction

This Internship Program Guide provides a brief description of the Asphalt Materials and Pavements Program (AMPP). The important role that summer internships play in this program is discussed, as well as highlighting the value of internships to both employers and students. The topics presented in this document are intended to help both students and employers identify important points for creating a successful internship experience.

Asphalt Materials & Pavements Program Overview

AMPP is a partnership between academia, the asphalt paving industry and state and local transportation agencies. The program will be the leading state and regional asphalt materials and pavements educator, research provider and technology transfer program to the asphalt industry, including local, state, and federal agencies, material suppliers, contractors and consultants. The program focus is on scholarship, research, education and training creating improved knowledge leading to improved quality, performance, economical, and sustainable asphalt materials and pavements.

Internship Description

An internship, as described in this document, is a paid work position intended for college students during the summer months. An internship is distinguished from a cooperative education (or co-op) position primarily by the length of employment. An internship position is typically only for the summer months while a co-op position usually includes working for a combined summer and a semester. A student usually receives some academic credit for a co-op position. The AMPP encourages students to participate in both summer internships and co-op positions. All of the points identified in this document for creating successful internships also apply for co-op programs.

Value of Internships to the Employer

The development of the future workforce and industry leaders is an important issue for everyone in the transportation field. Companies hiring AMPP affiliated students into internship positions have the opportunity to establish and develop a mutually important industry-university relationship with the AMPP. In addition to providing access to highly motivated students interested in working in the transportation field, this relationship can also provide the opportunity for the employer to participate in the educational process of future workers and leaders.

Participation in an internship program helps insure that today's students are familiar with the current issues and established business practices of your industry. Not only can you help educate an individual intern about these issues, that intern will bring their experiences back to their educational programs during the academic year to share with others. A good intern experience will result in the intern serving as a "goodwill ambassador" for your organization with university faculty and other students.

Hiring interns can provide an infusion of bright, young, highly motivated into your organization. Students fresh from an educational environment can help bring new ideas

and viewpoints to the attention of your existing workforce. This can be a refreshing and stimulating process that can have lasting positive effects on your organization.

Summer interns are an excellent source of temporary, and potentially permanent employees. This talented labor pool can help with special projects or seasonal activities.

Participating in an internship program can help with recruitment of new employees. It provides the opportunity to work with a prospective future employee without making a long-term commitment. In addition to helping identify top prospects, it can also provide the opportunity to screen out students that may not fit into your organization.

Value of Internships to the Student

Students participating in an internship are clearly making an investment in their career development. In addition to providing support to help them pay for college expenses, internships provide the opportunity to develop new skills and strengthen existing ones. It can also confirm career decisions or provide valuable insight into new career opportunities. Students get to “reality-test” a career field of interest by being exposed to the demands and challenges of a professional working situation. This gives a close range view of possible career paths.

An internship provides the student an opportunity to learn first-hand what skills and knowledge employers value. It can provide valuable insight into the prerequisites for employment and provide an increased awareness of the skills needed for success in a career of choice. In addition to providing the opportunity to apply and test the knowledge gained from past classes, an internship experience can increase the appreciation and value of future classes.

Students participating in internships enhance their future employment prospects by acquiring relevant work experience that helps build a strong resume. This helps students to gain that first job experience that most employers are looking for. Because prospective employers get a good look at a student during an internship, it can also lead to permanent employment opportunities.

In addition to relevant work experience, most employers are looking for good communications skills in new hires. Internships provide students with unique opportunities to develop and refine oral communication, interpersonal, and teamwork skills with subordinates, peers, and superiors.

Internships provide students with important opportunities to develop the critical skill of networking. By working with and around other professionals in a field of interest, students can establish contacts for reference letters and future opportunities. Students may also identify potential mentors while getting the opportunity to model professional behavior.

Creating Successful Internship Experiences

Students affiliated with the AMPP are looking for an educational element from their internship experience. These students will also recognize that they are expected to make a positive contribution to the organization hiring them. For an internship program to be successful, it must meet the needs and expectations of both the employer and the student intern. To help improve the chances of a successful internship experience, it is essential that these needs and expectations be clearly identified early in the process of selecting and hiring an intern.

The employer must carefully evaluate their needs in terms of the specific tasks and duties for which they are hiring someone. Within the context of these duties, employers should insure that they can provide a meaningful learning experience for the intern. An ideal situation would be to provide a natural progression of increased responsibility for the intern rather than a repetitive set of tasks for the entire term of employment. The intern will likely have a better sense of growth if they can accomplish something tangible during the internship. Providing training to interns takes time and effort, so the employers should honestly evaluate their willingness to invest this time.

It is important for the employer to clearly identify people within their organization that can take responsibility for the intern and provide supervision, as well as mentoring. Each intern will need to be individually evaluated to determine what level of activity and supervision is appropriate for their experience and maturity. It is also important that the intern have someone to look to for guidance and who can provide answers to questions. Assigning a mentor to each intern helps increase the intern's understanding of the organization and to maximize the learning experience.

While the primary objective of an internship should be its educational value, many students will consider the issue of compensation to be important. In today's competitive marketplace, there may be significant competition for AMPP affiliated student interns. Factors that should be part of the decision about compensation include the employer's budget, the intern's job function, and the skills and experience of the intern. The intern's financial needs will be influenced by their anticipated living expenses. Many interns will try to locate employment opportunities near their home while others may be looking for an opportunity to live someplace new. The intern's salary is a personal matter between the student and the employer. While it is important to discuss salary during an interview, if an offer of employment is extended, salary should always be included in a written offer.

One way to insure that expectations are clearly understood by both the employer and the intern is to use a type of written "learning-agreement". It is important that this agreement be kept simple to avoid the feeling of a formal contract. The agreement could include specific goals and objectives that the intern would like to accomplish during the internship. It should also provide a list of the employer's expectations of the intern and how those expectations fit within the objectives of the student. At the end of an internship, it is also valuable to have an exit interview with the student to review the learning agreement and to give and seek feedback on how to improve the program.

Asphalt Materials & Pavements Program Contact Information

Faculty affiliated with AMPP are willing to interact with potential employers to help develop summer internships and c-op positions that can directly complement the AMPP. Suitable positions are being sought throughout the broad range of transportation related organizations including construction, consulting, and local and state agencies. For more information about the AMPP to discuss possible summer internships, please contact Chris Williams, AMPP Director, Department of Civil, Construction & Environmental Engineering, 490 Town Engineering Building, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011, (515) 294-4419, rwilliam@iastate.edu.