

## Overview of Internships

### Internships Defined

*“An internship involves a moral contract between an organization and student that consists of a carefully monitored work or service experience in which the student has intentional learning goals relevant to their career and skill development interests.*

*The student upholds his/her commitment by applying their best efforts to help the organization achieve stated objectives.*

*The organization upholds its commitment by creating the needed structure and dedicating the proper resources to effectively manage the program, provide the intern(s) with meaningful work, and foster their professional growth through formal training and experiential education” (NSEE).*

### Program Characteristics

- The duration can be anywhere from a month to two years, but is typically between three and six months.
- The experience generally involves a one-time commitment.
- The specified duration may involve part-time or full-time work.
- The positions may be paid or non-paid.
- Internships may be part of an educational program that is carefully monitored and evaluated for academic credit. Internships also may be part of a learning plan that someone develops individually.
- Some important elements that distinguish an internship from a short-term job or volunteer work are:
  - Learning activities common to most internships include learning objectives, observation, reflection, evaluation and assessment.
  - An effort is made to establish a reasonable balance between the intern’s learning goals and the specific work an organization needs done.
  - Internships promote academic, career and/or personal development.

### Cooperative Education Programs (Co-Ops)

The terms co-op and internship are often used interchangeably. However, colleges and universities that use the term co-op often do so with specific parameters. These may include compensation, duration and activity requirements. Given the lack of consistency in usage and connotation, organizations, institutions and students simply need to clarify and align respective expectations to fulfill them.

*Some content above was adapted from materials published by the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE).*