What is an internship?
An internship is different from a job in that this experience should be deeper and richer than simply completing tasks, as you would in a job. Internships should involve higher levels of responsibility and independence. In-depth training and supervision also characterize them.

In the best of internship experiences, true career mentoring, observation and informational interview opportunities may be a part. Ultimately, your goal is to learn what people do in those careers and work settings, so that you can decide if you want to pursue that kind of work after you graduate.

Internships may be paid, or unpaid. They may be part-time or full-time. They may last for one semester, or longer. Some academic programs will require you to intern for a minimum number of hours. Know what you need and what fits your life.

Potential outcomes from internship experience
- Gain hands-on work experience in a professional setting.
- Develop and practice marketable skills.
- See the connection between academics and the work-world.
- Draw conclusions about careers and/or organizations of interest.
- Develop a network of professional contacts.
- Build and expand your resume, add to your accomplishments.
- A job offer!

First steps

What do you want to learn and experience?
Before embarking on the internship search, you first need to determine what you are looking for.

Some students will try to find an experience related to their academic major or minor.

Others know they have an interest in a particular industry.

- Can you identify fields of interest to you? e.g. management, communications, human resources, psychology, information technology
- Can you identify industries/sectors of interest to you? e.g. non-profit social services, insurance, banking, software development, manufacturing

If you cannot articulate what kind of work you want to experience, then you are not ready to write a convincing letter, or ask people for leads.

Too many ideas will make the task seem overwhelming. Therefore, the trick is to narrow your options.

Please make an appointment to see one of the career specialists in the Career Development Center; they can help you better narrow down what kind of internship you would like to pursue.
What do you need to apply?

- A resume reviewing your past academic, work, and volunteer experiences.
- A letter of interest describing the reason you are applying, your career interests, and the skills you offer an employer.

How to locate an internship site

Here are a few of many search strategies available:

- Search the positions posted to the University of St. Thomas Career Development Center Job and Internship Listings website - www.stthomas.edu/careerdevelopment/joblistings
- Talk to faculty, family, friends, friends of friends, people you meet on the light rail (!), anyone you meet through part-time jobs or volunteer sites. Let them know what kind of internship you seek. Often, you will get the best leads this way.
- Identify organizations of interest, research their website, get a contact name and call them to ask about internship opportunities.
- Develop your own internship. Many organizations may have not had an intern, but would be interested. It is possible to propose an internship with someone in your network.
- To connect with large corporations, undergraduates can check out positions posted through the Career Center’s On-Campus Interviewing Program. Interview applications are accepted the first two months of each semester, fall and spring. www.stthomas.edu/careerdevelopment/oci
- Stay in tune with the Career Development Center’s Seminars & Events webpage: on-campus, off-campus, and virtual job/internship fairs will be listed here.

Career Development Center Services

- Attend seminars: Job & Internship Search Strategies, Interviewing Skills, Resume & Cover Letters www.stthomas.edu/careerdevelopment/events
- Schedule an appointment with a career specialist.
- Use Pop-in Hours to get a quick question answered, or a resume reviewed. Do a mock interview and role-play an interview experience to polish your presentation and calm your nerves.
- Career website: See Career Resources for handouts, web links and webinars.
- Social media: Stay connected with the Career Development Center and connect with employers and alumni through University of St. Thomas LinkedIn Groups.

For more information on any of the above, please call (651) 962-6761.
Sample thank you & acceptance letter

Internships are pre-professional experiences, so begin the experience in a professional manner. If you have not been provided with an "offer letter" by your internship site, then you should write your supervisor your version, in the form of an acceptance letter. Below is a sample.

Date

Supervisor Name
Title
Company
Address
City, State Zip code

Dear ________________,

Thank you for your call yesterday. I am very happy to accept your offer to be an intern in the ________ department, with you as my supervisor. It is my understanding that my duties will include supporting you with ______ projects, creating ________, and doing research on ________. In addition, you have been very generous in offering to let me shadow other staff in their roles and attend customer meetings. I know that I will have a great learning experience because of my intern responsibilities.

As we discussed, I will begin my internship on [date] and it will conclude on [date]. My wage will be $15.00 per hour and you have indicated my parking will be complimentary.

Again, my sincerest thanks for the opportunity to work with you and your staff. I look forward to making great contributions and adding value to your organization.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your address
Your Phone
Your Email

Clarifying details such as the above in writing helps prevent misunderstandings and clarifies expectations. It is good professional practice.
Making the most of internships
Having realistic expectations about an internship will bring you the best attitude throughout your experience.

*Expect uncertainty.*
When you are being trained, lots of new information is being thrown at you as you and it may seem a little overwhelming.
- **TIP:** Carry a notebook/paper with you at all times to jot down people’s names, their jobs, instructions, anything you could forget.

*Expect some slow time.*
As you start your internship, you may be given smaller, less interesting tasks to help get your feet wet. You may complete projects faster than your supervisor expects. If this happens and your supervisor is not available, use your time wisely.
- **TIP:** Fill time by reading as much as you can about the industry, the organization, the career field. Find out who else you can offer assistance to when you have nothing to do. Be self-motivated and see other things to do—be creative!

*Expect good challenges.*
Once you are up to speed, your supervisor will begin to give you more responsibility. Don’t be surprised when you are given tasks with increasing independence.
- **TIP:** Make sure you are clear about the details of each task, the supervisor’s expectations, and any deadlines. Practice good time management! Ask questions.

Maximize your learning...

*Ask ‘Why?’*
- Make sure you understand the overall functions of your area and how your individual responsibilities fit into the bigger picture of the operation. Ask, what is the purpose of this task? Understand the ultimate outcome of your work.

*Ask for More.*
- More responsibility if and when you are ready for it.
- More information. (E.g. can your supervisor recommend a professional publication/journal on that industry or field?)
- More contacts. (E.g. conduct informational interviews with professionals in the organization.)

*Be Observant.*
- What are the communication channels like? Flat? Hierarchical?
- Who has the power? Why do they have the power?
- How do customers/clients perceive the organization?
- How are decisions made?
- Is the atmosphere relaxed? Frenetic? Pressure-filled? Fun?
- Do staff laugh and have a good time while being productive?
- Are there support systems, like affinity groups, for staff?

*Check in with yourself.*
- As you observe what the people and culture are like, check in with yourself. How does all of this feel to you? Comfortable? Not a good fit?

The ultimate desired outcome of any internship is for you to decide if you enjoyed the work, and if you meshed well with that kind of work environment. This information will help guide you in your future job search!
Ending the internship

- Be sure to have a final review meeting with your supervisor. Learn from the experience as much as you can; feedback is invaluable. Ask for specifics, "to what extent did I demonstrate skills x, y, and z? What contributions do you think I made? Areas I need to work on?"
- Also offer your assessment of the internship experience. What did you learn? What did you value? Areas for development?
- If you want to work there after graduation, tell them you are interested. If there are no openings, ask for referrals. Do they know other organizations?
- Always ask for a Job Reference from your supervisor. "Would you feel comfortable if I listed you as one of my references for future job applications?"
- Finally, always send a thank you note to your supervisor(s)!

You will gain the most benefit by finding time to try out multiple internships throughout your college career. How will you know if you fit best in a small business, a nonprofit organization, or a large corporation if you don’t find a way to experience more than one type of work environment?

Internships are wonderful – the time commitment is short, the potential gains are great!
Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Internships

What do I do if I am not sure what kind of work I can/want to do?

Make an appointment to see a career specialist in the Career Development Center. They can help you identify your interests and strengths, provide information about common careers associated with your major and help you brainstorm ideas. Call (651) 962-6761.

Where do I look for advertised internships? (See page 2 of this document)

The Career Development Center maintains a website where organizations post internships: www.stthomas.edu/careerdevelopment/joblistings

It is recommended that you Filter your Search to isolate Internships only, do this by logging in to Tommie Careers at tommiecareers.stthomas.edu. You can also set up email notification via a Job Alert if you want the system to email you when new internships connected to your interest areas are posted.

Can I make up my own internship?

Sometimes it is possible to work with a family friend or an individual working in a place of interest to offer your services as an intern. Preparing your approach would be important, so meeting with a career specialist first could help.

What do I need to apply for an internship?

Most employers require a resume and a cover letter. A career specialist in the Career Center can help you with these documents. You need to be prepared to explain why you want the internship, what you will bring to the employer (skills and experience, both from academics and previous work), and what you hope to gain from an internship experience. It’s also important to research the organization before you write your cover letter.

When would be an ideal time for me to start looking for summer internships?

On the one hand, it’s never too early to get a head start. However, know that some employers may not really know what their plans will be until after January 1st.

To apply to internships that are advertised, be ready to respond during the winter, when some application deadlines begin.

Many internships are developed through networking. It’s always a good idea to talk to professionals and gather information about employer-organizations. Let people know what you are interested in doing, and then stay in touch with them.

Note: Often, large corporations advertise, interview and hire their summer interns the fall before. Many of these employers interview through the Career Center’s On-Campus Interviewing Program. Common career fields for fall internship recruiting include: finance, accounting, actuary, and information technology, to name a few.