A Beginner’s Guide to Internships
What are internships?

The basic premise of an internship is that a junior or senior student works outside the traditional academic environment to gain practical job experience and extend his/her learning to a new setting. This covers co-ops, temporary projects and some full or part-time jobs. In all of these cases, the student receives academic credit for job-related research. We encourage organizations to provide at least a nominal salary to students, but interns can also volunteer their time. For geography students, the job must be related in some way to geography, and the research project should focus on some geographical problem. It is up to the student and the organization which sponsors the internship to agree on actual duties, compensation, hours, etc.

Pros and cons

Pros: Internships provide a unique learning experience outside the traditional academic environment, one where you can test the theories, concepts and methods introduced in the classroom. You also gain experience working with others and seeing how decisions are made. You have the chance to explore potential careers and make key contacts in the field. Perhaps most important of all, internships can provide you with the opportunity to get to know yourself better: What kinds of work do you enjoy the most? How do you react in particular work environments? What kinds of people do you like to work with? What things can you do particularly well? What area of geography would you like or do you need to know more about? What kinds of work environments or jobs really aren't right for you after all?

Cons: Internships can be wonderful experiences - educational, exciting, challenging - but they are not for everyone. Working as an intern involves discipline, responsibility and a firm commitment to get the most from this experience. Before finding an internship, set realistic goals and be sure this is really the opportunity for you. Do not expect to get rich. Although some
organizations do offer minimal salaries, many do not. What you will receive in the way of experience, contacts and knowledge more than makes up for the donation of your time.

**How to find internships**

If you've decided that an internship is important to you, your next step is to make contact with possible sponsors. There are lots of places here at Brigham Young University to search for these sponsors:

1) **Geography Department** :: You've already started here, but check the Geography Internship Board outside room 690 SWKT for current lists of contacts and position announcements, as well as alumni employment lists. Don't forget to ask faculty members or your advisor for suggestions. Remember that it is not their job to find placements for you. Most will be happy to provide you with information or possibly even contacts, but it is up to you to make use of the information. Another resource here in the department are your fellow students - about ten people per semester usually participate in internships, so find out how they went about getting their positions. Some current openings in the Utah Valley area are listed on this website under "Internships Postings".

2) **Career Placement Service** :: 2400 WSC. Although many people think the Career Placement Center is oriented towards graduating seniors, it is also a great place to expand your list of possible contacts. Remember, some summer jobs or part-time jobs can qualify as internships if they are related to geography, so take a look at other job listings as well. The Placement Center also has a small library which may be helpful in your search; don't forget to use the phone book and the Chamber of Commerce's index of local businesses. Don't get discouraged if you don't find many jobs listed for "geographers;" there aren't many of those. Descriptions of the duties involved give you a much better idea of whether you have the knowledge required for the position.

3) **Other places on campus** :: The library is a good place to look for information. The Lee Library has some career materials in the back of the Social Science section on the first floor. Also, other departments here on campus have their own internship programs: browsing through their materials may produce some leads. Also, check with the Internship Office (130A B-34) and Student Employment Offices (204 WSC) for job notices which might fall under the category of geography.

**Contacting Sponsors**

After researching, you should have a list of possible sponsors and contact information. When you contact them, you need to be politely aggressive, efficient and professional. Some things to think about before calling:

1. Be prepared for some curves; the internships listed may no longer be offered, or may be offered next fall, etc. Be polite but firm in getting to the right person to tell you which internships are available, now and in the future.

2. Prepare a story about geography. Many internships which Geography majors have actually received don't mention Geography as one of the qualifying majors, though many
do say something like "or other qualified majors." So be prepared to succinctly describe course content, skills and interests. For example, if you are into Planning, you could talk about your ability to analyze residential housing or retailing, suburban land use, etc.

3. Prepare a professional story about yourself. Some elements of this story might be your background and interests in the type of work this organization does, your course work, your writing, data-gathering, statistical and research skills, and your career goals.

4. Have at least a draft letter of interest and resume ready to go. Ideally, you should have a general copy on a CD or other digital file so you can make any needed changes to tailor it to the position, and print it out quickly. Many places will want to see a hard copy from you, and will be impressed if you get it to them quickly.

5. Be persistent and cultivate contacts. Even if things don't work out this semester, there are more semesters and more internships, and you may discover valuable advice on how to appear more competitive on paper as you go along. Don't be shy about calling people back after a decent interval has elapsed since you sent a resume. A polite but firm aggressiveness may be to your advantage.

6. When you do set up your internship, be sure that all of the arrangements between you and your sponsor are clear, including the length of the internship, hours per week, pay, supervision and, most importantly, the specific duties you will be performing. Menial tasks and answering the phone are not what internships are designed for. You may do some work like that, but make sure that you also will be doing work which will give you practical experience in the field of geography. When people do encounter problems with their internships, one of the primary reasons is that there are unclear expectations among the parties. Don't let this happen to you.

**Academic Credit**

Cooperative education and internships formally integrate university-level academic study with work experience in cooperating organizations. The combined study-work experiences are offered by academic departments as an extension of regular day school programs. They are designed to complement and strengthen the student's major field of study. In addition to cooperative education internships within the United States, internships in international settings are also available for students who are pursuing majors that focus on international curricula. The Geography department cooperative education and internship opportunities give full-time students a combination of academic learning with a work practicum. Students desiring to register for cooperative education must receive prior departmental approval and complete registration beforecommencementing an internship.

The usual rule is 50 hours of work equals one credit in Geography 399 or 599, so a "typical" internship involving about 10 hours of work per week yields three academic credits. Only three hours of 399 or 599 credit will count toward major requirements, but an additional six hours can count toward the total number of hours required by the university to graduate. (It does not matter to the department whether you receive payment for your work or not.

You will need to consult the department internship faculty advisor, currently Dr. Clark Monson in 676 SWKT (801-422-1774). Print out the Internship Packet.pdf or pick one up at 690
**SWKT for $1.00.** You will to bring this with you when you talk with the Geography internship advisor. You will also need to have filled out the "Pre-registration" page in the manual before you come in. The rest of the manual will be need to be filled out during your internship and turned into the faculty internship advisor at the end of the semester. The internship advisor will help you decide the number of credits you will need to register for based on your hours of work. After you have spoken with the advisor, you will need to go to the BYU Internship page and click on the link called "Student Application" (on the left). Read the student agreement, specify the semester your internship will take place during, and continue onto the application. You must **fill out all** the fields or your internship cannot be approved. Once your application has been approved, you should be able to register for the internship credit: Geography 399R. If you are still unable to register after a few days, contact Dr. Davis.

***As for the Reflective Paper, just remember: this is academic credit. Simply describing your job or the agency or company you work for is not enough; at the 400 level, analysis is expected. This basically means breaking your experience down and fitting it into a larger context by asking questions about the nature of your work, the processes you are a part of, how your industry or agency functions, what spatial questions you are involved in, etc. This shouldn't be as hard as it might at first seem, since, you should have lots of rules from your course work about how to go about analyzing particular kinds of social, economic or urban processes.

**Duties and Responsibilities**

During the course of your internship, you are expected to perform whatever duties are assigned to you by your sponsoring organization, as well as those assignments identified in your Student Internship Application.

**Possible Problems**

In any situation where you are dealing with people, it is possible for misunderstandings and personality conflicts to occur. Part of your learning experience will be to handle the problems in a professional manner as they arise. Don’t wait for small issues to mushroom into huge problems; encourage communication and feedback on what is going on. Along with unclear expectations, poor communication is the primary cause for problems in most internships. Hopefully, your maturity and communication skills will avert any major problems. If, however, a situation does arise which you and your sponsoring organization are not able to resolve, contact your faculty advisor or the chair.

If you have any questions that we have not answered here, please contact the Geography Department, 422-3851.