How to Make the Most of your Internship

* Look for an internship offering a substantial learning opportunity: The best opportunities are those that allow you to practice your existing skills and abilities, teach you something new, and complement your academic work.

Generally, a good measure of whether your internship is a ‘substantial learning opportunity’ is that if a faculty member were consulted, they would approve it as a credit-worthy experience.

* Set personal goals: With the help of a career adviser, faculty member, or mentor/supervisor in the organization, outline realistic goals and learning outcomes for your experience. Setting intentions before beginning your internship, will likely lead to a greater sense of accomplishment as you attain your goals and develop new skills. Take notes throughout your experience, and revisit your goals regularly. When your internship experience is completed, sum-up and evaluate your experience and articulate your new skills and experiences as an entry on your resume.

* Identify a mentor or supervisor and have regular meetings with them: Revisit your goals and learning objectives together, ask for feedback and give it as well. In some cases, where your mentor is extremely busy, you may need to take the lead in scheduling regular meetings.

* Ask questions and take initiative: Show interest in what your mentor/supervisor and co-workers are doing and don't hesitate to take on another task or two. Your enthusiasm for learning more about the organization will likely be met with positive reinforcement.

* Stay positive and enthusiastic no matter the task: You may occasionally be given work that is repetitive or that you feel is beneath the level of your capabilities, such as fetching coffee or making photocopies. The best practices response is to maintain the same level of enthusiasm and professionalism no matter what you are asked to do.

* Look to the future: There is always the potential for your internship experience with a particular employer to lead to a future employment opportunity. Think of your internship as a long-term interview. In essence, during your internship, you are interviewing the employer and trying out a career area, and the employer and others are observing you in the workplace.

* Pay is important, but not the main objective: If the internship is paid, that is good, and for some students it's necessary. However, many government and non-profit organizations host unpaid internships. If possible, work to find meaningful and highly educational internships over paying ones -- you will benefit most from the ones that will challenge you and will enhance your academic experience.

* Network within the organization: Learn your way around the people and the place, and take in as much as possible about the organization’s culture. Get to know your co-workers and show interest in their roles within the organization. Make the most of every networking opportunity and

* Look for an Internship that can potentially earn you academic credit: Optimally, your internship experience should be credit-worthy -- whether you opt to earn the credit or not.

--Adapted from the Career Opportunities News Minichart