



## OPTIMIZING YOUR INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

### *Setting up an internship*

- Brainstorm with your supervisor to find a project that matches your interests and allows you to work with people with a similar focus. Be very clear about your interests and what you want to get out of the experience.
- Be proactive about asking for work consistent with your abilities and level of experience.
- To be most effective, determine one specific project that will be your priority.
- If you are unfocused and undecided on your project, propose another meeting with your supervisor to discuss.
- Create a specific timeline of incremental goals and learning priorities while taking into consideration any constraints you foresee.
- Be clear when documenting your roles and responsibilities at the start of the internship.

### *Getting Acclimated*

- Talk with people at the organization to learn what they do if you aren't familiar with their work or the organization as a whole.
- Ask many questions, do online research, read books or find other ways to learn about the field and organization.
- Use fellow interns to expand your knowledge of interesting organizations. Consider visiting and networking with those that interest you.
- Jump right into your project, ask questions and research to learn what you don't know, and start sharing your knowledge with your supervisor. This will increase the supervisor's confidence in you, particularly if you are in an unfamiliar field or organization.

### *Making your internship meaningful/ Ways to work successfully (Tips from students)*

- Many students find they work independently at their internship. Clarify with your supervisor that if they expect this of you, they need to understand that you will have questions and need feedback. Try doing as much as possible by yourself and if you have a problem and have exhausted all options, ask for help. Keep asking questions until you get what you need.
- If you are working independently, stay motivated by setting up daily or weekly tasks and update your supervisor on your progress. Make sure each goal will help you achieve your overall goal for the internship experience.
- Be comfortable pushing back with your supervisor if you are given too many tasks. You have many responsibilities with school work. You may also have a large learning curve at your internship if you aren't familiar with the organization and industry.

- If you need to push back, state it in a positive way by saying, “I would like to focus on this right now” or “I’m concerned about finishing this project in time so I’d like to focus on that.”
- Talk with your supervisor if you feel you have too many tasks outside the parameters of your original internship project description. Review your goals with your supervisor about 3 weeks into your internship to make sure both of you have the same expectation.
- If you are given tasks that are not at a level sufficient for a graduate-level internship, be sure to let the faculty director of your internship course know of your concern. If your internship is not for academic credit, have another conversation with your supervisor to review your resume and skills/experience. Early action to resolve issues will result in an even more meaningful experience.
- Learn to respectfully offer differing opinions or suggestions to your supervisor. You will learn a great deal by debating various issues and hearing the insight of your more experienced supervisor.
- Develop good relationships with other interns that may be at your site. They may have more knowledge or experience at the organization and can provide advice and guidance.
- Come prepared to supervisor or staff meetings with a list of topics you’d like to discuss or a list of tasks discussed previously about which you can provide updates. Advance preparation will help you overcome feeling intimidated at your first few meetings.
- Prioritize your tasks with your supervisor based on what is most important and time sensitive.
- Ask many questions if you don’t know something – your supervisors understand this is an internship and you aren’t expected to know as much as you would for a full-time job.
- If you have challenges at your internship and you are participating in one of the for-credit internship courses at HGSE, discuss the situation with the professor of this course as soon as possible – don’t wait until the end of the semester.