

Tips for Providing Academic Internships at Camp

Hosting a student desiring academic credit can be a great fit. But, is it the right fit for your camp? There is an expectation that you will do your homework and become a co-educator. Your investment in the process will likely increase the productivity for your staff and enhance the experience for all. Here are some questions for you to answer as you consider taking on an intern.

Why should I invest the time? What are the benefits?

- Academic credit internships offer a way to attract students from a variety of majors: health care, nutrition, education, counseling, behavior management, grounds landscaping and maintenance, business management, as well as program specific areas (environmental education, dance, fine arts, trail guides, etc.).
- The student is earning a grade, so they often approach their camp responsibilities with a focused purpose and raised level of seriousness.
- You have the opportunity to prepare the next generation of leaders for a wide variety of occupations and give them the work force skills often missing from their academic courses. You can learn about new content areas from new perspectives, because the intern will offer you a window into their thoughts and knowledge gained through their academic studies. In many cases their school assignments will require reflection and thought about the experience, which they often need to discuss with you.
- Remember that the internship is a learning experience, not just a job, so be prepared to be flexible in the types of responsibilities the student may need to have in their camp job.

If a student approaches me, what should I ask?

- What are your learning objectives and the programs goals? Does the department require a learning contract?
- What length of time does your school require? How does that correspond with our needs at camp?
- Beyond summer, what time of year is possible for the internship? Off-season marketing/recruiting, preseason planning, postseason wrap-up & evaluation, standards preparation, budget development, etc.
- What are the requirements for this internship and the supervision required of camp administrators (each university is different)?
- Will your internship supervisor visit you while you are interning at camp?
- Can you accept a paid position or must the internship be unpaid?
- Will we need to provide you with any of our camp documents, business reports, or other types of materials?
- Will we need to provide evaluations of your performance and/or engaged in the grading process.
- If you are a day camp, does the student need housing and transportation help?

How does it work from the academic side?

- Most departments maintain a database of possible internships sites, so you'll want to contact the coordinator in several academic programs (or the office of internships) and get in those databases.
- Students typically find their own internship site; however, the faculty member approves the parameters of the job experience and learning objectives.
- The process can take less than a month for practicums and independent studies, but might take three to five months for negotiating internships.
- Prepare an e-mail that can be circulated to interested prospective interns. (Hint: test it! Have someone forward it back to you to consider the impression it makes.) Include the link to your Web site in the e-mail. School administrators will often not forward an e-mail of poor quality.

- Be prepared to educate your school contact about the learning opportunities at your camp and how the scope of exposure during the experience will be different than working a specific job at the camp, if it is a professional internship.
- There will be paperwork (likely a long contract) that clarifies roles around liability, insurance, assignments, and learning objectives. Be patient, as the university has its own set of liability issues and bureaucracy.
- There will be specific assignments ranging from a time sheet to a professional portfolio that will be verified by the camp supervisor and graded by the academic supervisor.
- The student will be paying tuition, and if negative performance review issues arise, there needs to be close contact with the academic supervisor as soon as possible.

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