

# Internships Are the Key to Your Career

by Carlena Jefferson Harris

Employers expect you to have completed at least one internship to be viewed as a competitive full-time job candidate.

Students majoring in technical fields should never overlook an opportunity to be an intern, domestically or internationally. Employers like to know that you have applied what you have learned within the industry.

## Why Are Internships So Important?

Internships have become key in today's economy for three major reasons.

The state of the economy has changed the nature of work given to interns. Employers do not create internships just to be nice to students and others interested in a certain career. Many interns are contributing to projects as if they were full-time employees.

Of course, companies that devote time and resources to finding, selecting, and training interns are looking for a return on their investment. The benefit might be in the present (using the services of talented individuals without having to make a hiring commitment), or it might be in the future (the added ability to choose a person who will work out well as a full-time employee).

You can view an internship as a 12-week interview! While an interview or a company test can add to what an employer knows about a person, an internship helps an employer evaluate how you would perform in the actual workplace. In addition, you get a deeper insight into the company, the position, the team, and the company's culture.

Many companies develop an internship pool and hire from that group. And remember that internship opportunities are not limited to office settings. From being a bird-keeping intern at a zoo to a horticulture intern at a theme park, all sorts of opportunities exist for motivated individuals and interested companies to enter into a mutually beneficial relationship.

## What Does a Technical Student Get From an Internship?

A technical student, needs to have at least one internship before graduation. Why?

### 1) Internships provide “real-world” experience.

Joining a company as an intern gives you the opportunity to work hands-on in a professional environment. In today's technical companies, an intern is not just there to get coffee or run errands but to gain real work experience. Internships help by teaching students more about the career path they are pursuing. Think of it like this: internships are a way to test-drive possible jobs and explore different career options.

### 2) Internships offer networking outside the college campus.

Internships often give you the opportunity to attend meetings and corporate events as an employee. By interacting with professionals, you gain new connections and learn how to communicate in a professional environment. Internships will introduce you to useful resources and give you the opportunity to meet a variety of professionals in your field. Networking as an intern helps you make new professional contacts

and find new job opportunities. Internships can provide you with a professional mentor before you graduate. You can stay connected with the individuals you meet via LinkedIn or request your managers/coworkers give you a reference.

### **3) Internships are resume builders.**

Without a solid resume it can be tough to be considered for a position. And how can you have a strong resume without any experience? Internships are key to building experience as a student or recent graduate. Employers are much more likely to hire someone with internships and work experience rather than someone with a generic resume lacking experience. Seeing an internship in your field of study says many things, including that you've has applied what you've learned in the workplace.

### **4) Internships enhances your time management skills.**

You will become a master of time management after 12 weeks in a fast-paced environment. In the workplace, you learn that every minute counts. You become aware of how being late on a project can impact a company's projected revenue or impact customer satisfaction ratings.

### **5) Internships provide the ideal career foundation.**

Internships provide you with the building blocks you need for your future. Choose your internship(s) based on your interests and career prospects. As an intern, you get their foot in the door with a company. You obtain access to the companies' leadership team and challenging projects, and get the opportunity to interact with current employees to learn first-hand what it is like to actually work with the company full-time.

Companies get a chance to confirm if what students are learning in the technical degree programs match their business needs and can provide feedback to the universities. Plus, employers say they use internships as a recruitment tool—some companies offer full-time positions to interns before graduation.

*Carlena Harris is the human resources manager of recruiting operations for National Instruments, Inc.*

Courtesy of the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#).