

**MICHIGAN STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY**

College of Natural Science

**Employer  
Internship  
Guide**



**MSU**

Employer Internship Guide



College of Natural Science

## Employer Internship Guide

### Table of Contents

- 4** **What is an Internship?**  
Before hiring an intern, identify what specific type of work needs to be completed.
- 4** **Types of Internship Programs**  
One-time curriculum-related work assignments referred to as “internships” are the most common type of experiential-based learning experiences within industry.
- 4** **Paid vs. Unpaid**  
Many internship programs offer some form of a wage or stipend.
- 4** **Academic Credit**  
Most students in the MSU College of Natural Science (NatSci) are not required to complete an internship for academic credit.
- 5** **Internship Position Descriptions**  
Creating a job description is an essential ingredient to the recruitment process.
- 5** **Interviewing and Onboarding Your Intern(s)**  
Interviewing intern candidates is very similar to interviewing candidates for permanent positions.
- 7** **Supervising and Mentoring**  
As an intern supervisor, you are responsible for facilitating the intern’s learning and performance on the job.

### Samples

- 9** Internship Description
- 10** Learning Agreement
- 11** Internship Offer
- 12** “No Thank-You” Letter
- 13** Interview Questions

### Additional Resources

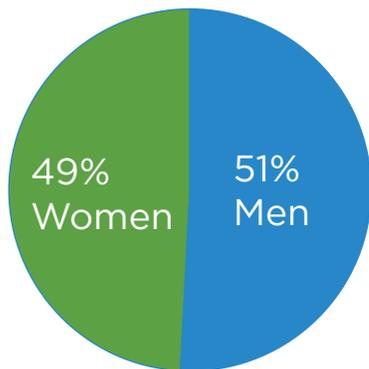
- 2** Fast Facts about NatSci
- 14** The U.S Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

The College of Natural Science (NatSci) at Michigan State University (MSU) is home to 27 departments and programs in the biological, physical and mathematical sciences. The college averages \$28 million in research expenditures annually, while providing world-class educational opportunities to nearly 5,000 undergraduate majors and nearly 1,000 graduate students. Many of the undergraduate students within MSU NatSci contribute to world-class research projects, on and off campus, and participate in internships at prestigious companies such as Cargill, Covance, DuPont, Amway, Pfizer, Zoetis, Jackson National Life, Humana, Quicken Loans and more.

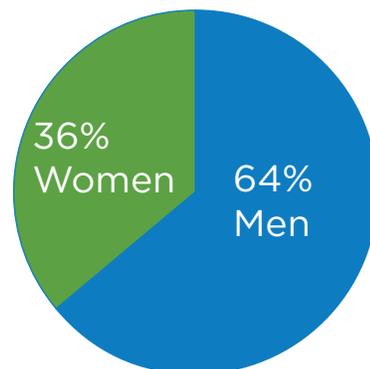
## Fast Facts for College of Natural Science

### Student Enrollment Profile

880 Bachelor's  
Degrees Granted



209 Graduate  
Degrees Granted



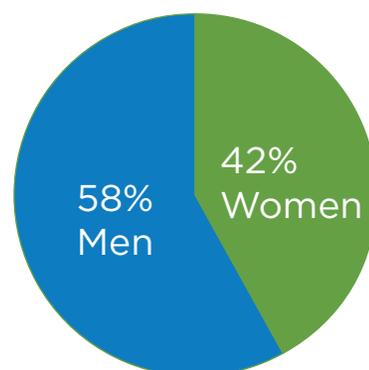
Students Enrolled (Fall 2013)

4,883 Undergraduate  
Students Enrolled



Historically  
Underrepresented  
Students

796 Graduate  
Students Enrolled



## Undergraduate Majors in NatSci

BS = Bachelor of Science; BA = Bachelor of Arts

### Biological Sciences

Biochemistry & Molecular Biology – BS  
 Biotechnology – BS  
 Biological Science – BS  
 Biomedical Laboratory Science – BS  
 Environmental Biology/Microbiology – BS  
 Environmental Biology/Plant Biology – BS  
 Environmental Biology/Zoology – BS  
 Genomics & Molecular Genetics – BS  
 Human Biology – BS  
 Microbiology – BS  
 Neuroscience – BS  
 Physiology – BS  
 Plant Biology – BS  
 Zoology – BS

### Physical Sciences

Astrophysics – BS  
 Chemical Physics – BS  
 Chemistry – BS & BA  
 Computational Chemistry – BS  
 Earth Science – BS  
 Environmental Geosciences – BS  
 Geological Sciences – BS  
 Physical Sciences – BS  
 Physics – BS & BA

### Mathematics

Actuarial Science – BS  
 Computational Mathematics – BS & BA  
 Mathematics – BS & BA  
 Mathematics, Advanced – BS & BA

## Leaders outside the Classroom

As a premier research institution, MSU offers an enormous number of undergraduate research opportunities. Many NatSci students take advantage of this unique opportunity to gain hands-on research skills alongside internationally renowned scientists, making them excellent candidates for lab-based and field-based internships.

MSU has also led the nation in study abroad participation among public universities for years. Nearly one out of every five NatSci students participate in global learning experiences through MSU, during which they develop intercultural competencies and important skills such as problem solving, leadership, and learning a foreign language.

## MSU NatSci Student Intern Recruitment

Recruiting great talent is often a large undertaking. One way of “testing” a student’s capability is to hire them as an intern. Internships are often a win-win situation for both employer and student. During an internship experience, students get the opportunity to apply what they’ve learned in the classroom to an industrial/research setting while broadening their professional network and utilizing important skills such as communication, critical thinking and problem-solving. Likewise, organizations traditionally benefit from a student intern’s fresh ideas while having the chance to see a student’s on-the-job performance in a temporary setting before extending a full-time job offer. From a recruiting perspective, internships play a key role in building your talent pipeline.

## What Is an Internship?

Before hiring an intern, identify what specific type of work needs to be completed. This assessment will help you determine the type of position and skill set desired. To be considered an internship, a position must:

- Provide a learning experience that parallels the student's course of study.
- Have a defined beginning and end (i.e. it should last the length of a semester and/or 10-12 weeks, etc.).
- Adhere to clearly defined learning outcomes related to the professional goals of the student's field(s) of study.
- Be supervised by a professional employed by the hiring company or organization.
- Include an evaluative component, whereby the supervisor offers routine feedback and at least one formal evaluation of the student's performance.
- Provide resources, equipment and facilities that support a professional learning environment for the student.
- Take place in a setting other than a private home.

## Types of Internship Programs

One-time curriculum-related work assignments referred to as “internships” are the most common type of experiential-based learning experiences within industry. However, other terms are occasionally used to describe similar types of opportunities. Unpaid internships in which a student voluntarily performs a service or series of undertakings—not necessarily connected to the student's course of study—are usually referred to as volunteers. Cooperative education (Co-Op) refers to experiential-based learning through paid employment in practical work assignments that are aligned with the student's course of study and often stretch beyond one semester. It is not uncommon for students participating in a Co-Op arrangement to pursue academic credit and alternate between full-time employment in one semester and school full-time for the next semester.

## Paid vs. Unpaid

Many internship programs offer some form of a wage or stipend. If it is unpaid, there must be a strong training component for the student, or the experience should be referred to as a “volunteer experience.” MSU NatSci recommends that employers offer some form of financial compensation to their student interns whenever possible. The U.S. Department of Labor has identified six criteria to help students and employers determine if an intern can be non-paid. For more clarification regarding internship program specifications, see the criteria outlined by the U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act on [page 14](#).

## Academic Credit

Most students in MSU Nat Sci are not required to complete an internship for academic credit as part of their curriculum or graduation requirements. However, some students may decide they want academic credit for the internship.

If this is the case, it is up to the student to make arrangements with his/her academic department or the NatSci Internship Coordinator. There is little difference between students who receive credit and students who do not. An agreement form and evaluation may be required for the credit-seeking student. Also, you should know that students can be paid while receiving academic credit.

Effective summer 2014, students will have the option to enroll in CNS 491, a one-credit course specifically designed for any NatSci student participating in an internship. Within this specific course, the CNS Internship Coordinator will require signed agreements between the student and the employer who is hosting the internship to document mutually agreed-upon learning outcomes, assure proper working conditions for the experience and collect any reflective essays documenting what the student has learned during the internship.

### **Internship Position Descriptions**

Creating a job description is an essential ingredient for the recruitment process. Accurate position descriptions articulate the duties and responsibilities for the internship and clarify expectations of the hiring employer. Employers who post effective job descriptions through MySpartanCareer, the online job posting system for the MSU community, are much more likely to draw a larger candidate pool and attract the attention of strong candidates. Posting a position to MySpartanCareer is one of the helpful strategies employers can utilize to promote jobs and ensure top talent at MSU will see and hear about an opportunity with their organization.

**When crafting a position description for an internship, you'll want to include (at least, but not limited to):**

- ◆ Organization/company name, division, and department
- ◆ Position title
- ◆ Supervisor to whom the intern will report
- ◆ Responsibilities
- ◆ Required/preferred qualifications
- ◆ Compensation
- ◆ Methods for application

To get more ideas on how you might structure a position description for an internship with your organization, see page 9 for a sample position description.

### **Interviewing and Onboarding Your Intern(s)**

#### *The Interview*

Interviewing intern candidates is very similar to interviewing candidates for permanent positions. This is a very important step in the recruitment process as you want to make sure the intern will provide you with the skills and

abilities you're looking for, as well as fit in with the culture of your organization. If you have not conducted an interview before, you'll want to consider the helpful questions and tips, listed below, to help ensure that you find the best candidate. You can also visit [page 13](#) to see a complete list of sample questions to consider when preparing an intern interview.

- ☛ Open the interview to build rapport and provide an overview of the interview.
- ☛ Ask questions and gather information on the candidate.
- ☛ Make sure to include time for the candidate to ask questions.
- ☛ Discuss candidate's availability for the internship (start date, hours).
- ☛ Provide the candidate with information regarding next steps in the application timeline and when s/he can expect to hear from you.
- ☛ Once candidates have been evaluated, promptly follow-up with them.

Once you have finished the interview process, you will want to select which candidate(s) you would like to hire. It is important to communicate effectively with all of the candidates you interviewed, even those you do not plan to make an offer. See [pages 11 and 12](#) to reference a sample Internship Offer Letter and a sample "No Thank-You" Letter, and to get more ideas for these stages of the process.

### *Orientation*

Helping an intern feel welcome and comfortable within your organization/department is very important. It will help the intern become settled in his/her role and, in turn, provide you with the results you're looking for more quickly. Some elements of a new internship orientation may include:

- ☛ Reviewing your organization's mission and vision.
- ☛ Discussing the organizational culture and providing an organizational chart.
- ☛ Providing a staff directory with important phone numbers and/or contact information.
- ☛ Reviewing employee policies and expectations for the organization.
- ☛ Explaining specifics regarding parking, the intern's work station, specific work dates/times, dress code, attendance expectations, etc.
- ☛ Completing the Internship Contract and review Learning Goals/Outcomes.
- ☛ Providing a tour of the company's facilities and an introduction to staff members.

### *Student Learning Objectives*

The development of challenging work assignments that complement the student's academic program is often accomplished through learning objectives. Internship learning objectives help the student (and the supervisor/employer) understand what he/she will be learning during the experience by attaching specific projects or tasks to core competencies that are agreed upon by the student and supervisor. Internships completed for academic credit generally require this type of agreement; however, internships that aren't tied to academic credit should still adhere to some type of agreement about what the student will learn during the experience. Learning objectives also provide both parties with a context for what the student will be evaluated on during the internship and at the end of the experience.

Learning objectives should be written by the intern in conjunction with his/her supervisor. The student should identify three to five key elements they hope to learn while completing the internship. As part of the educational process, internship work activities should focus on projects specifically related to the student's primary field of study. It's also important to make sure the learning objectives are measurable and achievable.

Once the goals for what the student will learn are determined, the supervisor can help the student identify the projects or work assignments that will help achieve the student's objectives. Learning objectives, while specific to the student intern, can (and should) still align with goals of the organization/company. To generate more ideas for learning objectives, see [page 10](#) for a sample learning agreement.

### **Supervising and Mentoring**

As an intern supervisor, you are responsible for facilitating the intern's learning and performance on the job. Additionally, the student will look to you as a mentor who will assist their transition from the classroom to the work environment. Since the internship is an extension of the learning process, you will need to provide opportunities to bridge the two experiences.

We suggest that you meet with your interns regularly to provide feedback concerning their performance. During these meetings, the students can:

- 🕒 Report on the status of a project.
- 🕒 Ask questions.
- 🕒 Learn how their work is contributing to the organization.
- 🕒 Participate in an evaluation of their strengths.
- 🕒 Discuss areas needing growth and development.
- 🕒 Get a sense of what kind of work lies ahead.



At the same time, you will have an opportunity to coach, counsel and reinforce positive attitudes and performance. If the student intern enrolls in academic credit as part of his/her internship experience, you may have some interaction with your student's campus internship coordinator through phone calls, email, on-site visits and/or written evaluations to help the student complete his/her obligations for the course.

Encourage your intern to keep a portfolio of work accomplished during the experience. This will help fulfill the student's academic requirements and provide them with a sense of accomplishment. This will also give you foundational things to discuss in performance evaluations or supervisory meetings.

Providing a solid supervisor is important, but providing a mentor can be the difference between an average internship experience and an exemplary internship experience. Mentors contribute to the facilitation of student learning in an industrial and/or off-campus environment by helping student interns make connections between what they've learned in the classroom and what they're learning in the workplace. Mentors and supervisors might also consider requiring the intern to complete a self-evaluation halfway through the experience and at the end of the internship. This strategy ensures that expectations (for student and supervisor) are being met, and provides a solid foundation from which the mentor can provide consistent and constructive feedback.

## Sample Internship Description

**Company name:** Best Company

**Job title:** Laboratory Assistant Intern

**Supervisor:** Senior Scientist, Jane Boss

### About the Position

The intern will participate with other members of the Nutritional Chemistry & Food Safety division in the forensic analysis of known and suspected food contaminants. This is an area of increasing importance in ensuring the safety of the global food supply. The intern will have the opportunity to work with high-end instrumentation, i.e. liquid chromatography mass spectrometers, to analyze a variety of raw ingredients and finished food products to determine if they have been adulterated—intentionally or unintentionally—with substances harmful to human or animal health.

### Duties and Responsibilities

The intern will assist the senior scientist(s) and other analytical associates and contractors in all aspects of the department, including but not limited to:

- ◆ Conducting analyses in compliance with applicable methods, protocols, SOPs and regulatory guidelines.
- ◆ Learning how to produce high-quality data and document work appropriately.
- ◆ Developing a proficiency with laboratory equipment and software for assignments.
- ◆ Attending and participating in project meetings.
- ◆ Contributing to a cohesive team environment.
- ◆ Maintaining a clean and safe laboratory work environment.

### Desired Education/Qualifications

- ◆ Pursuing a degree in chemistry, biochemistry, food chemistry, food science or related curriculum.
- ◆ Open-minded and sensitive to the cultural, ethnic, religious and daily activity norms of individuals from around the world.
- ◆ Familiarity with lab equipment; previous lab research experience is preferred.
- ◆ Excellent interpersonal communication and writing skills.

**Compensation:** \$13/hour

**How to apply:** Candidates may apply online at <http://careers.bestcompany.com>, or e-mail resumé, cover letter and writing sample to [Jane.boss@bestcompany.com](mailto:Jane.boss@bestcompany.com).



## Sample Internship Offer

Date

Intern Name

Intern Address

Dear (Intern's first name):

I am pleased to confirm your acceptance of an internship position as (Title) in the (Department Name) at a pay rate of (hourly wage/stipend, if applicable). Your first day of work will be (Date). Your duties and assignments for this position will be those described to you in your orientation with (Supervisor's Name).

This offer is contingent upon completion of a physical examination (including a drug screen), completion of employment processing procedures and a criminal and/or financial background check. Please report to the Human Resources Department at (Time) on (Start Date) with the appropriate documents and completed forms.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact (Supervisor's Name) or me. We are very pleased that you have decided to join (Operating Company Name). We look forward to seeing you on (Start Date) and offer a very warm welcome.

Sincerely,

(Insert signature here)

(Print your name)

(Your title)

*Source: Prima Civitas Internship Toolkit*

### Sample “No Thank-You” Letter

Date

Intern Name

Intern Address

Dear (Intern’s first name):

Thank you for your interest in an internship opportunity with (Company Name). Although your background and qualifications are impressive, we are unable to move you forward in the hiring process at this time. Our Human Resources Department will contact you in the event that an appropriate future opportunity arises.

Thank you again for your interest in (Company Name). We wish you success in your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

(Insert signature here)

(Print your name)

(Your title)

*Source: Prima Civitas Internship Toolkit*

## Sample Interview Questions

- ⬆ Tell me a little about yourself.
- ⬆ Why are you interested in this position?
- ⬆ Why are you interested in our company/organization?
- ⬆ How has your coursework prepared you for this internship?
- ⬆ What are your specific strengths/weaknesses?
- ⬆ Tell me about a time you had to address conflict in the workplace or some kind of professional setting outside the classroom. How did you deal with it? Results?
- ⬆ Describe for me a time in which you had to work as part of a team. What was your end goal? What were the results?
- ⬆ Give me an example of a time that you were able to take the lead in changing policy or practice for your organization.
- ⬆ Tell me about a time when you overcame obstacles to finish a project with a pending deadline.
- ⬆ Articulate for me a time in which you came across a stressful situation at work and how you handled it.
- ⬆ Describe for me a time during which you used creativity to solve a problem.
- ⬆ What do you do outside of the office to alleviate stress?
- ⬆ When you're not at work, what do you like to do for fun?

## The U.S Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

The U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which applies to all companies that have at least two employees directly engaged in interstate commerce and annual sales of at least \$500,000, severely restricts an employer's ability to use unpaid interns or trainees. It does not limit an employer's ability to hire paid interns.

You don't have to pay interns who qualify as leaders/trainees. The U.S. Department of Labor has outlined six criteria for determining trainee status:

1. Interns cannot displace regular employees;
2. Interns are not guaranteed a job at the end of the internship (though you may decide to hire them at the conclusion of the experience);
3. Interns are not entitled to wages during the internship;
4. Interns must receive training from your organization, even if it somewhat impedes the work;
5. Interns must get hands-on experience with equipment and processes used in your industry; and
6. Interns' training must primarily benefit them, not the organization.

If all of the factors listed above are met, an employment relationship does not exist under the FLSA, and the Act's minimum wage and overtime provisions do not apply to the intern. This exclusion from the definition of employment, however, is necessarily quite narrow because the FLSA's definition of "employ" is very broad.

At MSU, we strongly encourage for-profit companies and organizations to pay their student interns. Choosing to compensate interns for the work they contribute will not only alleviate concerns of legality, but additionally, it will help incentivize the position and ensure that top candidates are more likely to consider your position(s). You may choose to pay the intern(s) hourly, in a lump sum at the end of their experience (stipend), and/or through benefits (such as housing and living expenses).

If you have questions regarding intern compensation, or would like access to resources illustrating current trends in internship compensation to help inform your approach to paying your student intern(s), feel free to contact Chris Sell, Internship Coordinator for NatSci, at [sellchri@msu.edu](mailto:sellchri@msu.edu) or 517-884-6029.