Internship Overview/Frequently Asked Questions

What is a credit-bearing internship?

Eligible undergraduate students in the College of Mass Communications and Media Arts can complete 3-9 credits (depends on major) that can be counted towards their degree through an internship. Eligibility requirements for internship credit depend on your major. Generally, students must have junior standing or higher, good academic standing, and have completed certain coursework. Students must submit a short application, register and pay for credit and fees (1-6 hours per internship), complete a certain number of work hours at their internship site, and finish an academic component under the guidance of a faculty advisor in order to earn the credit. Credit-bearing internships are graded pass/fail. Find out the specifics for your major by speaking to your academic advisor or the internship coordinator or viewing the “For-Credit Internship Application and Information document” on the [MCMA Internships website]. Graduate students should speak with their faculty advisor regarding graduate credit for internships.

What if I don’t need or want any credit-hours or don’t meet the class-standing or GPA requirement for my major? Can I take an internship without credit?

In many cases, yes, but it depends on the internship site or program. Some organizations will require you to take academic credit in order to participate in their internship; others don’t care. Note that the “MCMA Residential Studies Program” is a for-credit program and requires you to enroll in 1 or more credits (see more info on this program below).

How do I find an internship? Will you find an internship for me?

Students are expected to be an active participant and drive their own internship search process. The skills you will develop in finding an internship can then be applied towards your job search after graduation. SIU Career Services and the College of Mass Communication and Media Arts are here to support you in this process and provide the following services:

- Workshops on resume and cover letter writing, interview strategy, and other professional development
- Listserv postings of internship opportunities
- Appointments to discuss and provide suggestions for your individual internship search
- Feedback and suggestions for completed applications (except the MCMA Residential Studies)
- MCMA Residential Studies Internship Program
- Placement through the SIU Extern Program (job shadow/mini internship over spring break)

Your first step is to do some reflection on when you want to intern, what types of experiences you are looking for, what geographic locations you are open to, and what skills you can provide an internship site.

Visit [SIU Career Services] for additional information on what they offer students.
Are there any internships in _ (fill in your field or hometown)? What are they?

Yes, it is very likely an internship (or many) exists in the field and location you are considering. The smaller the town, the more flexible or enterprising you may need to be. For example, no, there may not be a large advertising agency in a smaller town, but there are likely businesses and non-profits that have communication units that do advertising and integrated marketing work.

There are thousands of possible media internships across the United States, many of which are changing deadlines and qualifications on a regular basis so it is impossible to keep a master list of them all. That said, for popular locations and fields for SIU students (e.g., video production in Chicago) we may have recommendations on places you should consider based on where SIU students have interned in the past. It never hurts to ask. Before releasing suggestions of places to apply, we expect you will have your resume reviewed by SIU Career Services, and that you are prepared to be professional in all your communications with potential internship employers.

What is the MCMA Residential Studies Internship Program?

The Residential Internship Program is one of many summer internship options for MCMA students. In the Residential Studies Program students submit an application to the college of MCMA, live with other SIU students in coordinated housing, and receive substantial assistance in securing their internship. Locations are subject to change each year, but the most recent Residential Studies locations have been Nashville and Hollywood. Students must pay a program and housing fee in addition to SIU summer tuition/fees for the number of credits they are taking. Admission to the program is competitive and accepted students are expected to be substantially involved in the placement process including participating in interviews with employers and submitting additional application materials directly to employers as needed. Applications are due at the end of January. More information is available from the MCMA Internship Coordinator and on the MCMA website.

Outside of the Residential Studies Program there are multitude of opportunities for students interested in interning in Chicago, New York City, Washington, D.C., St. Louis, southern Illinois or a host of other locations. The primary differences with the non-residential options are that you will typically submit applications directly to employers and you will arrange your own housing accommodations (though in some locations we can provide recommendations based on where previous interns have stayed). The residential studies program is a good option for students who want more support in their searches and are specifically interested in completing a for-credit internship in the destinations offered.

Are there any paid internship positions in my field?

In media fields, the majority of internships have historically been unpaid and required to be taken for credit, though paid internships in the media are slowly starting to become more common. As you might expect, paid internships tend to be much more competitive (though there are very competitive unpaid positions as well). Students who are flexible about the type of opportunity or location of their internship will usually find more paid opportunities. For example, the marketing unit of State Farm Insurance pays its video editing and graphics interns. Students who apply to the Residential Studies Internship program
must be open to accepting either paid or unpaid internships. Internships can still be high quality and an excellent investment in yourself even if they are not paid, but ultimately whether or not you are willing or able to take an unpaid internship is a decision you will have to make for yourself after you have learned more about various positions and taken all factors into account. Many unpaid internships will understand that you might need the flexibility to have a paid job in addition to your internship and are accommodating with scheduling to that end.

If you take an unpaid internship and you find that there are minimal opportunities for networking, observing, or learning in your field, even after you have proven yourself to be professional and reliable, please feel free to talk to the MCMA internship coordinator for strategies on how to proceed.

**I don’t think I can afford an internship. Can SIU financial aid help?**

It is a major commitment, but an internship doesn’t always have to be an expensive endeavor. Many students intern part-time and work part-time while living on their own or with friends and family. Having experience in your field on your resume is still extremely valuable, even you need to minimize expenses by living in your hometown or Carbondale and work at smaller media or arts organization.

Where the expense comes in is if you plan to relocate for your internship and have to pay for expensive temporary housing and food, or if you intend to take academic credit in which case, you would have to pay tuition and fees for as many credits as you planned to take.

In fall and spring semesters, you can apply your financial aid to internship credits the same as you would towards any other courses. In the summer, if you take 6 credits worth of coursework (either 6 internship credits or a combination of internship and other courses) AND have financial aid money left over from the academic year, you can sometimes apply that aid. If you can truly use the 6 credits, this may be a good solution; otherwise, you may want to pay out of pocket for the minimum number of credits possible or search for an internship that does not require you take it for credit. **Always speak to the SIU financial aid office about the particulars of your situation and whether financial aid is available.**

**At what point in my academic career should I complete an internship?**

Some internships are open only to currently enrolled college students while others will accept recent graduates as well. Many organizations prefer interns who are at junior standing or higher (note that Radio, Television, and Digital Media and Cinema and Photography majors are required have junior standing to complete an internship for credit). That said, first-year and sophomore students have been known to find and complete internships and this typically helps them become more competitive in future internship and job searches. For lower-classmen in particular, it often helps to make use of your personal networks/connections (e.g., relatives, parents, family friends, church/social/volunteer groups, fraternity/sorority, friends, past employers or advisors) to find out about opportunities.

One benefit of completing an internship your sophomore or junior year is that you can use the internship to refine your career and academic goals while you still have time left in school. A benefit of completing an internship your senior year is that your intern site has the option to directly hire you into a position, if available, once you graduate. Completing multiple internships, of course, can be a win-win.
How long does it take to find an internship? When should I start applying?

As soon as you know the semester you would like to complete an internship, you should start to gathering information on potential opportunities. Application deadlines will vary quite a bit. For example, some very competitive programs or sites may have deadlines as early as October or November for summer internship programs while others will not be posted until late spring. Some sites will not have formal deadlines, but rather work on “rolling” admissions (as they receive inquiries, until filled). Many deadlines will fall around 6-16 weeks before the start of the internship period. In sum, start your research as early as possible and work on your search consistently until you finalize where you are going.

I am feeling really unsure of how to start my internship search.

1) Determine when you would like to complete your internship
2) Consider your goals and make a list if job fields and titles and areas you would like to explore. Determine what your dream internship would look like, but also list all areas you would be open to, even if they are less related. Consider - do you need/want to take if for credit or would you like to avoid taking it for credit?
3) Choose a couple geographic areas you’d like to focus on.
4) Start researching and networking! Check out the Internship Search Guide posted on the MCMA website for a list of ideas on where and how to research.
5) Just do it! You have to start somewhere. If you never put yourself out there, never reach out to possible employer or never submit an application, you’ll never find an internship
6) Visit the MCMA Internship Coordinator or an SIU Career Services Counselor for feedback on your application materials, interview tips, and other suggestions

How hard is it to get an internship? What are my chances?

The process can be fairly competitive, but the answer to this question really depends on the individual candidate, their background experience, their goals, and how committed they are to finding an internship. The more flexible you are willing to be and the more work you are willing to put into your search, the better your odds will be. You have to be prepared to take ownership of your search and put in the time—which may include calling (not just emailing) around to potential internship sites to ask about their opportunities. Getting some sort of experience while at SIU in student organizations, undergraduate research, work-study positions or off-campus jobs, or volunteer activities is helpful to making a competitive application.

The most surefire way to land an internship is by working your network – make sure every family member, family friend, old boss, mentor, sorority/fraternity member, classmate, etc., knows you are seeking an internship. Even if you think you don’t have any connections in your field, you might be surprised who does.

If you are struggling to find an internship directly in your area of interest (or even if you aren’t), consider related areas that might be less competitive or more prevalent. For example, a student who ultimately wants to be on-air on radio should consider internships in radio promotions, marketing, sales, or radio
office administration; a student who is interested in film could work at a non-profit film festival or screening room; a student who was interested in advertising could look for an administrative office position, and so on. You will still develop your resume and “soft” work skills, learn about work environments, meet and network with a variety of individuals, gain references, and can sometimes ask to complete small projects in other areas. Additionally, many competitive internships prefer students who have already completed at least one internship; so finishing one in a field that may be of less interest could pay off to landing your dream position. If you go this route, make sure you are committed to the internship and participate fully with a good attitude, whatever tasks you may receive. If you are half-hearted and don’t work as hard as if it was your “dream” internship, then you will be negating any benefits.

What skills are internship providers looking for?

Employers consistently list initiative, interpersonal communication skills, writing ability, the ability to work in teams, strong work ethic, and problem-solving skills as their top desired traits. Verbal communication is frequently the highest rated skill in surveys of employers. The key is to demonstrate these skills through your experiences, writing, work samples, and interviews, rather than just state you are a “good communicator” in your resume or cover letter. In more technical areas, the ability to operate certain equipment and software or artistic ability may also be prized.

MCMA students are encouraged to develop their resumes by participating in registered students organizations or other involvement opportunities on campus, completing undergraduate assistantships or research, volunteering or working in the college at WSIU PBS and NPR stations, or holding a job on or off camps in order to be most competitive when applying for internships. We’ve found that the students who land the most coveted internships tend to be very involved as a student-leaders in media-related student organizations on campus.

What exactly is an internship and how is it different than a job?

An internship is an opportunity to gain experience in your field through in-person observation and hands-on learning at a relevant organization or company. In most cases internships are different from entry level jobs in that they are usually short term (3-6 months) with an established end date, are closely supervised, and include structured training and learning opportunities. While participating in an internship, you should reflect on what you are learning about your career goals and interests, what skills you are cultivating, and how the practical experience connects to your academic work in the classroom.

If you want to get the most benefit, you should always treat an internship with the same commitment as you would any paid employment, but no there is no guarantee of a job at the end.

Who should I talk to if I have more questions or need assistance?

Your academic advisor, the MCMA Recruitment, Retention, and Internship Coordinator, or an SIU Career Services career counselor are all great people to talk with.