

## **Creating A College or University Internship Program Tip Sheet**

By Lisa A. Lundy

Author of: The Super Allergy Girl™ Allergy & Celiac Cookbook

[www.TheSuperAllergyCookbook.com](http://www.TheSuperAllergyCookbook.com)

Internships can provide a fantastic learning opportunity for college or university students and provide great value to nonprofit organizations and small businesses. It seems as if larger corporations are fully aware of how to take advantage of college or university internship program, yet often smaller businesses or nonprofit organizations don't know where to begin. I created an internship program with Penn State University in the College of Communications in the fall of 2008. I had three interns in the fall of 2008 and four in the spring of 2009. I was personally delighted with the results of my Penn State interns, and I know that the interns rated the program I ran very highly.

This document is designed to provide tips on how to create such a program. As long as credit is given as listed above, the contents of this document may be freely shared on websites, blogs, and in publications. Credit constitutes the copyright symbol along with the author's name, title and website address as listed above.

### **1. Decide if you will offer a PAID or UNPAID internship program**

Whether or not you are paying an intern makes a difference in the expectations that a college or university has for the internship program. Here is a general description of how it works at many, but not all, colleges and universities.

**PAID internships:** you can select any field, set the pay (hourly, flat amount, stipend) and create the job description for the position and define what needs to be accomplished during the program. If you are skilled in the area and will be providing guidance, coaching and mentoring, you can also get the college or university approval and have the student get credit for the internship in addition to the compensation offered.

**UNPAID internships:** you must have experience at a level where you can coach, mentor and advise students in the field selected. For unpaid internships, college students can receive college credit for working, if your program is approved. What this means is that while you may need a website, you could not set up a credit internship that is also unpaid in computer sciences if you didn't know and have mastery in the area of web design.

### **2. Write up your program**

Write up the what, when, where, how, how much and why of your internship program. What will the college students do? What will they learn? When will they work? Where will they work? How will the program go? Who is an acceptable candidate? Put all of your details in a written document that is concise and clear.

### **3. Research your college or university selections**

What college or university is convenient? What college or university has the expertise, classes or programs you may want to tap into? Do some research on the college or university of your choice including which college or department you would need to contact for your program.

**4. Submit your written program to the college or university**

Having done your research and knowing which college or department to submit your program to, send in your program.

**5. Don't let any rejection get in your way**

If you get rejected, do not stop! Revisit your approach and have someone critique your program. Is anything missing? Could it be improved? Submit your program to a different college or university. A less prestigious college than Penn State rejected me without even seeing my program or knowing anything about me. If you get rejected, get back in the game and look around for a different college or university.

**6. Meet with the college or university officials**

Once your program is accepted, schedule a meeting with the college or university department that your internship program falls under. Nail down their expectations. Find out what works for them and the reasons why internship programs fail. Be frank and listen to what they tell you. Create a partnership with the school so that everyone is happy.

**7. Once you are accepted – manage your interns**

Find out from your students what they need. They may not be assertive enough to tell you what they require, or they may simply not know. Ask them how things are going on a regular basis. Do not leave them sitting around not knowing what they should be doing. This is one reason that some internships fail – the students don't have projects to work on or jobs – or they are unclear about what they should be doing. Some college students will need a bit more managing than others. You'll have to figure out what structure you need to put in place to manage your interns.

**8. Anticipate student needs**

Put yourself in the shoes of your intern. What might you need? What might they have questions about? Anticipate the needs, concerns and questions of your students. They will appreciate it.

**9. Make sure you have created a win-win-win**

When the students get a fantastic learning experience, and the university or college is satisfied with your program and you have accomplished your goals or completed your projects – that is a win-win-win. Make sure everyone wins.

**10. Keep asking how can I improve my program?**

The hallmark of a consummate professional is striving to improve their business, their personal life, the lives they touch. Keep asking yourself: how can I improve my internship program? Then make the changes necessary.