Internships and co-ops are great options for developing resumés, getting hands-on experience, and building a professional network. Participating in an internship or co-op requires a commitment of time, energy, and resources. Provided is information to help University of Maine internship coordinators, faculty and staff navigate this process.

What are internships and co-ops?

Internships are work experience related to a student’s major or career interests. Opportunities can be paid or unpaid, full-time or part-time, for academic credit or not for credit. When possible, monetary compensation is recommended.

A cooperative education experience (co-op) is an educational program integrating academics with a career field of interest, such as engineering. Co-ops are usually completed over more than one semester. A co-op typically includes work assignments related to the student’s career and academic interests and is a paid experience. Academic credit is earned for these types of programs, and is based upon a learning contract agreed upon in advance by the employer, the student, and a faculty advisor.

When utilizing an internship or co-op experience for academic credit, faculty must endorse the student. This can include developing and agreeing to a learning contract, monitoring the student’s progress throughout the duration of their experience, and grading the student’s work. Students can utilize the INT196 course to receive academic credit for their work.

How can you help your student find an internship?

The Career Center recommends internship sites be vetted by faculty or staff before referring a student or advertising the experience to the University of Maine community. This ensures the authenticity, value and safety of internship site. Students should also know who their point of contact is at the University of Maine should they encounter any difficulties during their internship. This is usually the internship coordinator for their department, or they may contact the Internship Coordinator at the Career Center.

We recommend internship employers follow the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) guidelines for best internship practices and that all internship coordinators familiarize themselves with these guidelines. Please see a complete list here: http://www.naceweb.org/internships/15-best-practices.aspx

Who needs an internship?

Internships can benefit any student in any field. Some majors and degree tracks require internships to enable students to apply their education and skills while making professional
connections and building their resumes. Students should work with their advisors or department’s internship coordinator to determine if an internship is required or recommended.

**Why should students participate in an internship?**

There are many benefits to completing an internship or co-op. Internships help students evaluate prospective career choices while utilizing theories learned in class and skills developed from campus involvement to help solve real workplace problems while gaining experience. Students can gain valuable workplace connections as well as network with prospective employers.

**When is the best time to get an internship?**

Most internship sites require students to have some college experience prior to beginning an internship. This means completion of one to two years of college coursework. Internships can take place at any time of the year but most often coincide with an academic semester: fall, spring, or summer. Most internships for University of Maine students take place over summer breaks. Most established internship programs require applications and interviews months before the internship begins. Summer internships may have application deadlines as early as the previous fall. Many students complete more than one internship, and if this is a consideration plan accordingly and start early.

**Help your student determine the type of internship or co-op they need:**

Majors, personal interests or career goals can determine the type of internship of interest. For questions about exploring majors and careers, please utilize the Career Center staff and resources, such as the Career Center website and the Maine Mentor Program.

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**How can your student find an internship or co-op?**

A great place to direct students is to searching CareerLink, the Career Center’s internship/co-op database. Visit the Career Center’s homepage for links to search engines for co-ops and internships.

Students can also utilize the Career Center’s publication library for information regarding career opportunities.

Check academic department bulletin boards for postings. Register on CareerLink to be eligible for on-campus recruiting with employers looking for interns and co-op students.
How students can apply:

Each internship and co-op has a different application process. Most require a cover letter, resume, interview, and references. Work with your student to prepare their application materials or encourage them to schedule an appointment with a career counselor at the University of Maine Career Center by calling 207.581.1359.

Most internships and co-ops will request references, so be prepared to help students identify a minimum of three professional or academic references.

What’s my role as an internship coordinator?

If the student is taking the internship for credit or as part of their major requirements, help them work with their advisor or internship coordinator to develop a learning agreement/learning contract.

Students should contact their faculty coordinator to develop the learning contract and sign up for the field experience course if they are hoping to earn academic credit.

Internship coordinators can assist in identifying students who might be qualified or a good fit for an internship. They can correspond directly with students, share information and ensure faculty in their respective departments are made aware of opportunities.

Work with your students to help them prepare for their internship experience. Encourage students to learn how to identify and respond to potential problems on site (such as safety concerns, injuries or Title IX complaints.) Work with your department head or college Dean to determine what the best courses of action are for monitoring and responding to your students’ needs while engaged in an internship.