

Developing a Quality Internship Program

Source: Career Development Internship Program Employer Handbook, GCSAA

To get the most out of your interns, it is imperative to develop an internship program that is a win-win for your facility and for the student.

To be a valuable experience for both the student and the sports turf manager, goals and expectations must be aligned. The goal of a quality internship should be to provide a supervised work experience for students to build their expertise and proficiency in turf and athletic field management, as well as enhance their problem solving abilities. The internship structure should allow students to build skills and apply them to special problem solving situations.

The program must be built around the educational experience of the student. Start by having the intern send to you an outline of what he or she would like to accomplish at your athletic facility. Each intern you hire will possess different capabilities and will bring a different level of experience to the internship. A high-quality internship program must be able to offer to student interns a well-rounded, all-inclusive experience.

Write a well-defined plan of activities and job tasks for the student intern. Be sure to include a broad spectrum of responsibilities, so the student gains a better understanding of the overall operations of your athletic field management program. Structure the internship so that the student gains knowledge and experience, but also contributes to the operation with their knowledge and experience. Be sure to make them feel like valued members of the staff. Involve them in your staff meetings and the meetings you have with your employer.

To help ensure that you can attract potential interns to your facility, be able to offer some additional perks aside from the pay wage, such as a housing benefit for students. For some facilities, such as colleges and universities, this is an easy benefit to offer. For other facility types, such as high schools, you may want to limit your recruitment to local students who live nearby or can easily drive to the facility. You might consider offering a transportation allowance for these students. Awarding a bonus for staying through to the end of the internship may also be helpful. The student receives monetary compensation and you have the seasonal help needed. Meals and uniforms may also be appropriate for some internship programs.

When developing a program, consider timing. Some facilities offer internships during the summer months only. A longer internship – for example over a six-month period – may provide a more rounded experience, exposing the student to important activities that occur during the other seasons. It is important that the intern become more than a hired hand or cheap labor on your maintenance crew. The primary purpose of a good internship program should be to expose students to the practical side of sports field management so that students can tailor their education to best meet a realistic career path.

Practical experience helps students better understand classroom theories and information and how they are applied to real conditions on the field. It is also an excellent way to prepare for the transition from the classroom to the workplace. In addition, the internship allows students to develop personal contacts, which may lead to job placement opportunities and build self-confidence, leadership and good communication skills while working with others.

Since getting a job after graduation is usually the major goal for students, expand your internship program to help them with employment search skills. Set up mock interviews. Review and critique their résumé, being sure it gives prominence to the internship experience. Introduce them to other sports turf managers. Provide them with a list of networking contacts. Of course, a logical outcome of an internship program is to hire that student after graduation. What better way is there to groom an assistant and have a legal sneak peek of their work ethic?