

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING- Tip Sheet

Internships ■ Co-ops ■ Summer/Part-time Jobs Work-Study/Campus Jobs ■ Practicums ■ Externships/Shadowing

DEFINITION

Experiential learning means learning through experience and observation. These opportunities allow students to experience a problem or situation, learn from the experience, and apply that learning to new problems or situations in a “real world” setting. Experiential learning opportunities take place in a variety of ways. Some experiences may be specific to particular majors/fields, such as student teaching and clinicals. While definitions can vary, a few general definitions are included below:

- **Internships-** An internship is usually a one-time work or service experience completed by a student who has gained some academic preparation in their professional field. The student works under the supervision of at least one practicing professional. Internships can be paid or unpaid. Many students apply for academic credit for the internship experience. For more information about receiving credit, refer to the Academic Internship Program Tip Sheet. Internships that do not receive academic credit may still be eligible for the SET. Please contact the Career and Professional Development Center (CPDC) for more details.
- **Co-ops-** Cooperative education experiences (co-ops) are usually completed by a student over more than one semester. Students typically alternate semesters of full-time class study and semesters of full-time major-related employment. Most co-op programs are paid and involve academic credit. Note: Although RMU does not have a formal co-op program, some positions listed by employers as co-op may be available to students as an internship experience.
- **Summer/Part-time Jobs-** These positions are a form of employment in which the student is paid to work for the employer for a position that is seasonal or requires less than full-time hours. Many summer and part-time jobs can relate to a student’s major and provide experiential learning opportunities. Part-time and summer jobs are posted online through Handshake.
- **Work-Study/Campus Jobs-** These jobs are paid positions and typically take place on campus. While some are not related to academic majors, these jobs can provide experiential learning opportunities. Federal Work-Study or University Student Payroll funding may be required by some campus employers. Some Federal Work-Study positions are also available off campus at community service organizations. Work-study/campus jobs are posted through Talent Track. For more information, refer to the Student Employment Program Tip Sheet.
- **Practicums-** A practicum is typically a one-time work or service experience completed by a student as part of an academic class or major requirement. Almost all practicums are completed for academic credit. They can be paid or unpaid experiences.
- **Externships/Shadowing-** These experiences provide students an opportunity to observe a professional on the job. They are not paid and usually not completed for academic credit. Externships/shadowing experiences can last from one day to several weeks in duration.

BENEFITS

- Test out different career options by gaining firsthand experience
- Learn more about a particular occupation or industry
- Apply classroom learning to the “real” world
- Provide experiences to help build your resume
- Meet professionals in your field of interest and develop networking contacts
- Gain related experience that employers look for when reviewing candidates for full-time positions

SEARCH PROCESS

1. Decide what kind of positions you are interested in.

- Look through sample listings to spark interest and learn what types of positions exist.
- Look through the Career Resource Guide for your major to learn about career options. Career Resource Guides are available in the CPDC and through Handshake (“Career Center” > “Resources”).
- Browse through a variety of career options resources available online through Vault, linked to the CPDC website.
- Make an appointment with your CPDC career coach to discuss interests.
- Consider taking an interest inventory at the CPDC.

2. Research career fields and employers of interest.

- Research employers using ReferenceUSA, available online through the RMU Library.
- Use internet resources including specific employers’ home pages.
- Use additional resources including CPDC employer directories.
- Talk to people working in your field(s) of interest. Ask CPDC staff members and professors for suggestions.
- Join the Robert Morris University Career Network, a LinkedIn group that provides an opportunity for RMU students, alumni, faculty, and staff to connect with each other about career-related topics.

3. Prepare your resume and cover letter.

- Refer to the Resume Writing and Employment Letters Tip Sheets.
- Meet with your career coach in the CPDC to have them critiqued.
- Upload your resume into Handshake.
- Remember to tailor your resume and cover letter to the position for which you are applying. Make it clear how your skills and background are a good match for the position and employer.

4. Apply for positions that interest you.

SEARCH STRATEGIES

1. Internet Sites

Internships:

Handshake (the CPDC’s registration, job posting, and event management system) – www.rmu.edu/cpdc

- Log in to your Handshake profile.
- On the Handshake menu bar, click the “Jobs” link and enter your search criteria. On the initial page (Job Search), you may enter a job title, employer or keywords into the search box and/or enter a city, state or zip code. Click “Filters” to select additional criteria, such as job type (full-time job, part-time job, internship, etc.), industry, job function, major, and more.
- Some employers also opt to interview on-campus for internship candidates. To view these internship opportunities, click “Jobs” on the Handshake menu bar and then “On-Campus Interviews.”

Go Government: Students and Entry-Level Talent – <http://gogovernment.org>

Idealist.org – www.idealist.org

ImaginePittsburgh.com – <https://imaginepittsburgh.com>

Indeed – www.indeed.com

Internships.com – www.internships.com

Nonprofit Career Network – www.nonprofitcareer.com

Pathways for Students & Recent Graduates to Federal Careers – www.usajobs.gov/studentsandgrads

Pittsburgh Technology Council – www.pghtech.org

The Washington Center – www.twc.edu

Work-study/Campus Jobs

Student Employment Program (SEP) – www.rmu.edu/cpdc

- Work-study jobs are posted in Talent Track. A link for Talent Track is provided on the CPDC website.
- Please refer to the Student Employment Program Tip Sheet for additional information.
- To discuss opportunities available off campus, please contact the CPDC at 412-397-6333 to schedule an appointment with the Student Employment Coordinator.

Part-time Jobs

Handshake – www.rmu.edu/cpdc

- Local employers often contact the CPDC to post part-time positions. These positions are included in Handshake under the “Jobs” tab (Job Search screen). Please note that these positions may not be related to academic majors.

2. Newspapers, Trade and Professional Journals

- Apply to position announcements posted in newspapers and professional publications.
- Ask professors for field-specific recommendations.
- Refer to the Career Resource Guides for listings of professional associations.

3. Conduct a targeted resume mailing/phone campaign.

- Identify employers of interest by using ReferenceUSA, available online through the RMU Library, employer directories and other library resources. You may also receive leads from people you know (professors, family, friends, etc.). If targeting a specific city, don't forget to use regional directories, general area internet searches and information from the Chamber of Commerce.
- As long as you do not see a notation of “No phone calls please,” consider calling the employers to inquire about possible positions and to verify to whom you should direct your correspondence/email.
- Send the employer a tailored resume and cover letter. (Refer to the Resume Writing Tip Sheet and the Employment Letters Tip Sheet.) Send resumes first to employers who have indicated that they currently have a position available. For those who are not currently hiring, when you have time, you may still want to send a resume to be kept on file in case a position does become available.
- If you sent your information to a specific individual at the organization, after 7-10 business days, consider calling the employer to follow up. This action shows interest, initiative, and may set you apart from other candidates.

4. Speak with networking contacts to learn about career-related information and leads.

- Start with people you know: parents, friends, parents' friends, other family members, neighbors, etc.
- Let them know what types of positions you are looking for.
- Join the Robert Morris University Career Network, a LinkedIn group that provides an opportunity for RMU students, alumni, faculty and staff to connect with each other about career-related topics.
- Consider joining a professional association and attending local meetings. Refer to the Career Resource Guide for your major to explore a list of relevant professional associations.
- Consider joining professionally focused clubs and organizations on campus and attending meetings. Ask other members about their internship and job experiences.
- Follow up with your networking contacts periodically.
- Refer to the Networking Tip Sheet for more detailed information.

5. Watch for job and career fairs held on and off campus.

- Refer to the “Events” link on Handshake for a list of upcoming job fairs and networking events.
- Research the employers who will be attending the fair.
- Practice how you will introduce yourself.
- Make sure your resume is tailored and error-free and then print copies on quality paper.
- Refer to the Job Fair Tip Sheet for helpful tips on making the most of a job fair.

6. Set up an externship/shadowing experience.

- Ask CPDC staff, academic advisors, faculty, and networking contacts for suggestions.
- Informational interviews are a great way to explore possible sites. Refer to the Informational Interviewing Tip Sheet for more details.

7. Consider volunteering with a nonprofit organization.

- Use the ReferenceUSA database to identify nonprofit organizations.
- Contact the Office of Engaged Learning and Community Involvement, located in the Nicholson Center.
- Look for nonprofits in your industry or field to gain relevant experience and make networking contacts.
- Become involved in volunteer opportunities sponsored by clubs or organizations to which you belong.

8. Consider working for temporary employment agencies.

Temporary jobs provide an opportunity to earn money, gain experience, and make networking contacts.

- Investigate agencies and ask about job options.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

CPDC Home Page: www.rmu.edu/cpdc

- **Handshake** – for access to part-time jobs, internships, full-time job postings, and on-campus recruiting opportunities.
- **Academic Internship Program** – provides information about the application process.
- **Talent Track** – provides access to postings for work-study jobs and graduate assistantship positions.

Career Resource Guides: available in hard copy in the office, through the CPDC website, and through Handshake (“Career Center” > “Resources”)

Available for most majors, these guides provide information about career options, professional associations, job listing websites, clubs/organizations, and a sampling of internship sites and full-time employers.

CPDC Tip Sheets: available in hard copy in the office, through the CPDC website, and through Handshake (“Career Center” > “Resources”)

- Academic Internship Program
- Employment Letters
- Government Job Search
- Informational Interviewing
- Interviewing
- Job Fair
- Job Search Strategies
- Networking
- ReferenceUSA
- Resume Writing
- Student Employment Program