

## Assisting Students with Internships

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### **Abstract**

Assisting students with appropriate internships is critical for their future success. Often the question arises, how does a faculty member become involved in this process? This extended abstract seeks to give some recommendations for faculty members in assisting their students with this process.

One tool a faculty member can develop to be involved in student internships is to compile and retain an up-to-date list of possible local/regional/national openings; many of your students will help you compile this list as it is in their best interest. You can also consult with your campus's career placement office. Over the years, many students have approached me about internships and this list has been very helpful.

In certain instances, after seeing an internship advertisement, I have approached a student with this information as it was well matched to their strengths and goals. Other times, I have urged a student to apply for an internship they would not usually feel adequately suited to apply. The bottom line for us as a faculty member is to see the potential in our students and to understand how the right internship can help them develop as an engineer.

Another way you can assist your students with internships is helping them target their application to the advertised opening. Many students create one resume and use it for all occasions. I suggest they modify their resume for the opening they are considering. Help them highlight the desired skills and experiences that best fit the internship description. In certain cases, I suggest the student establish an internal contact at the company or agency seeking more specific information about the opening.

Faculty references letters or evaluations are a common part of an internship application. Your reference letter must be honest and accurate when submitting an evaluation of a student. I try to highlight the student's strengths and comment on how this internship will help them with their growth as an engineer. To be the most helpful to your students, make sure your reference letter or evaluation is done promptly and ahead of the deadline. Not meeting the application deadline may cost the student the internship position. In some rare cases, a company or agency may contact you by phone or email. Be sure to return the call or email as soon as possible; be upbeat and positive about the student. Remember, the internship being applied for may not fit the student and occasionally you will be unable to offer a positive recommendation.

It has been very helpful to me as a faculty member to interview each student after they have finished their internship. Information gained by this interview will help the next time another student is interested in applying to this company or agency. Additionally, this returning student can establish internal contacts that could lead to more internships and a higher placement rate.

**Keywords**

Extended abstract, Internships, Placement, Skills, and Application

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Kevin R. Lewelling, PhD, PE received his PhD in 1997 from the University of Oklahoma where he specialized in semiconductor lasers. He served as Assistant/Associate Professor of Engineering Physics from 1998 to 2004 at Oklahoma Christian University. Dr. Lewelling has been Associate/Professor of Electrical Engineering at the University of Arkansas Fort Smith from 2004 to present. Current research includes electric vehicles and autonomous Lunar/Mars rovers. This research has involved over 50 undergraduate students.