

Episode 48 –Graduate Degree Internships

Welcome to Grad-post! I'm your host, Brian S. Mitchell, and we're here to talk about life before, during, and after graduate school, and whether an advanced degree is right for you. I'll draw upon my experiences as a graduate dean and research mentor, as well as my network of students, colleagues, and experts to bring you the most complete information on graduate education that I can.

Let's talk about graduate internships today. These are opportunities for you to work in an organization or company outside the university or college that provides real-world training while you're in graduate school. They are for a specified period of time – typically three months or so – are usually paid positions, and allow you to continue enrollment in your degree program while you work. There are similar types of experiences like externships, community service, and part-time jobs, but that's not really what I'm talking about. Externships tend to be shorter with fewer formal responsibilities whereas internships are generally paid positions for several months that tend to have specified duties and outcomes. Community service is typically voluntary and does not necessarily utilize the skills you are developing in your degree program, and part-time work is – well – just work. I'm talking about full-time, structured work opportunities that are similar to the type of work your advanced degree is training you to do.

There are enormous benefits to internships during graduate school. They give you an opportunity to work with an organization in an area related to your advanced study. They expand your professional network. They let you apply what you have already learned to real-world problems. And – in most cases - they can provide you with some much-needed cash flow! They don't always lead to a job offer from the organization you are working for after graduation, but sometimes they do. They are similar to co-op programs at the undergraduate level, but less structured than those one-semester work, one-semester school programs. They could be during the summer like some undergraduate internships, but they need not be. They are definitely not work study, as that is a federally subsidized work-while-going-to-school program mostly for undergrads. Rather, these are three to six month programs that mostly involve physical relocation and time away from studies and your research project, although remote internships do exist. There's a great testimonial for internships from a [University of Michigan Computer Science graduate student](#) on some of the benefits of graduate internships. Note that multiple internships at different organizations like this student had are increasingly common, but if you can manage just one, it's a great way to enhance your advanced degree.

You may think that graduate internships are only in areas like the STEM fields, political science, cybersecurity, or public policy, but they are available for all areas of study. The [Humanities Clinic at Wayne State University](#) is an example of a university-sponsored internship program specifically for graduate students in the humanities and social sciences. The semester-long internships are through Detroit-based non-profit organizations and businesses and provide the participants with exposure to employment opportunities in the public humanities. An opinion article from [Insider Higher Ed in 2022](#) lists other notable examples of humanities-based graduate internship programs and how these opportunities relate to the larger concept of [engaged scholarship](#). Don't let your area of research or the name of your program limit where you take an internship. In fact, that's the whole point of internships: they're to show that humanists and social scientists can make important contributions to non-traditional areas like technology and vice versa. So where do you find these internships?

Start with your career center for opportunities specific to your discipline and geographic area. Then there's always the internet. There are some 350 [internships for PhD students listed in LinkedIn](#), over [200 listed on indeed.com](#), and a staggering [60,000 PhD summer intern jobs listed on Glassdoor.com](#) as of this broadcast, and if you simply do a Google search, you come up with all kinds of corporate PhD internship programs.

There is a nice compendium of [opportunities and external listings at The Versatile PhD](#). Similar internship resources are available for MBA, MSW, or any other master's or doctoral degree, really. But those aren't the only source of internships. In addition to the ones that you find on your own and hope that you can squeeze them in around your classes, there can be internships directly integrated into the degree program. You don't have to go hunting for the position. You don't have to break the bad news to your advisor that you will be gone for 3-6 months. You don't have to navigate the complicated visa issues if you are an international student. All of that is taken care of for you – ish - by your PhD program.

These PhD programs with integrated internships are not common, and I'm not so much trying to sell them to prospective graduate students as I am trying to sell them to program directors and graduate deans across the country. Students want these. They are good for their careers and they are good for the programs they are in. In addition to the public humanities internships at Wayne State cited earlier, there are standing PhD internship programs like those at [Boston University](#) and the [A2i+ program at North Carolina State University](#). There are even opportunities for international internships. The reasons there aren't more of these programs are many and varied, but it comes down to the fact that it takes work to establish and maintain these programs, and there are deeply-rooted misconceptions about their drawbacks.

Two of the biggest difficulties concern faculty buy-in and time to degree. There's not much I can say about how faculty feel about their students taking internships except that opinions run the gamut. The problem, of course, comes when your faculty advisor is fundamentally against you taking an internship. Their argument is probably that it will take time away from your research project. What they are really concerned about is the impact **your** internship will have on **their** career. There is little you can do to convince them except maybe point them to this podcast or some of the resources it contains. You have to convince them that your success will ultimately be their success, and chances are an internship will make you more successful. How your research advisor feels about internships is a question you should be asking before selecting one, as I outlined way back in Episode 2, but if you are stuck with an intransigent research advisor, then you either have to seek help from higher ups like the department chair or school dean, or simply go it alone. I know of students who have basically called their advisor's bluff. When threatened with being kicked out of the group if they go on the internship, they went anyway. Guess what – they weren't kicked out of the group. These instances are rare, but you need to be your own advocate.

Of more realistic concern is whether taking an internship will significantly increase the time to your degree. Evidence here is scant, but at least [one study in the life sciences from 2018 involving 218 PhD students at two University of California system institutions](#) showed that for those who participated in the joint internship program, their median time to degree was not negatively impacted. This same study showed that PhD internships also helped students avoid postdoctoral positions later on which in the life sciences have proved to be problematic from a career advancement standpoint. However, the biggest issue with internships - especially for international students who must maintain continuous enrollment for visa purposes - is how to continue as a student in good standing while on the internship. This is where university-sponsored programs can be most beneficial, as they have already worked through this administration issue through the establishment of courses that count as full-time registration without generating tuition requirements. Ancillary considerations like maintaining student insurance and access to campus facilities like the library can also be addressed through administrative involvement. In the absence of structured internship programs, you will need to work through these logistical issues yourself. Talk with a graduate school representative on how best to manage the enrollment issue before accepting an internship offer.

For you current and prospective graduate student listeners, I hope I have generated some interest in pursuing an internship. It's never too early or too late to incorporate one into your studies. And for faculty and administrators, I hope I have given you some things to think about and some resources to help you start an

internship program in your department, program, or school. In the end, it's a great recruiting tool as resources become scarce and fewer students are pursuing advanced degrees.

Thank you for joining me today. All of the links provided in my podcasts are available on my website at grad-post.com. There, you'll find additional information and resources to help you plan your adventure for an advanced degree.

Just like every job you've ever had, every degree counts. Or in this case, they both count at the same time!

Links

<https://www.linkedin.com/jobs/phd-intern-jobs/>

<https://www.indeed.com/q-2025-phd-internship-jobs.html?vjk=51922582b1682a0e>

https://www.glassdoor.com/Job/phd-summer-intern-jobs-SRCH_KO0,17.htm

<https://ai.engin.umich.edu/2024/09/23/internship-tips/>

<https://phdplus.virginia.edu/internships/phd-plus-internship-program>

<https://grad.wisc.edu/professional-development/internship/>

<https://www.career.berkeley.edu/grad-students-postdocs/graduate-students-internships/>

<https://s.wayne.edu/humanitiesclinic/>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2022/02/24/universities-should-assess-experiential-learnings-value-phds-opinion>

<https://www.depts.ttu.edu/provost/outreach-engagement/about/engaged-scholarship/>

<https://www.bu.edu/gps/resources/summer-internships/>

<https://grad.ncsu.edu/professional-development/careers-outside-of-academia/a2i/internship-module/>

<https://www.lifescied.org/doi/full/10.1187/cbe.17-08-0164>