

SELECTING A BENEFICIAL INTERNSHIP SITE

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Student Centered Site Selection

Not all internship sites are created equal, and not every great internship site is great for every student. To find the best internship site for you, you must discover what you want to get out of the internship experience. This is your internship and no one else's internship. Do not take the first internship that comes along. The more options you investigate, the greater the likelihood that you will end up with an internship that fits who you are and what you are looking for.

Ultimately, you are responsible to take the time to investigate the internship options available to you and to pursue those options. You should invest some time early in your academic career looking at internship options. You need to clarify your goals for obtaining an internship and decide what kind of internship you want to have.

A key part of this is networking. The more people who know you and know what kind of internship you are looking for, the better your chance to find an internship that fits. You cannot wait until the last minute to find an internship.

At the same time, be realistic. Internships require a huge commitment of your time and energy. You need to know ahead of time the limitations that you face. These can include family situations, transportation difficulties, financial considerations, time availability, lack of credit opportunities, and school internship requirements.

Internship Site Selection Questions

Just as you hopefully did your homework in deciding on which school to attend, it is important for you to do your homework on which internship opportunity to pursue. In the discussion that follows, I have tried to spark the investigation process for you with some general questions.

School Requirements

First, what are the school's requirements for an approved internship? Do not just assume that any and every internship opportunity that is presented to you will qualify as an official internship for your degree plan. What are the specific internship requirements of your school and for your degree plan? At this early stage, it is vital for you to speak to the academic instructor who oversees internships at your school. I know from personal experience that this person will appreciate you coming by early in your selection process instead of trying to convince him or her that the job you have already signed up for will be the "perfect internship" for you.

Experience and Training

Second, examine your past experiences and training. What previous field experience have you had? For example, if you have already done an internship as a youth minister, you might want to try something different. Also ask yourself what coursework or skills training would be relevant to a particular internship? Therefore, if you have not had any of your preaching classes yet, you might not want to take an internship where the primary role is preaching each week. And finally, ask yourself if this internship opportunity give you a chance to apply and test your education? If you are training in one particular ministry area and the internship has nothing to do with that ministry area, you need to consider if that exact internship is a wise choice.

Time

A third area to consider is time. An internship is not like another class. You need to honestly ask yourself how much time can you realistically allocate to this internship opportunity each week? And you need to see if your school schedule will allow you to take this internship opportunity at this time? And most important of all, is your family able to support your internship opportunity?

The last thing you want to do is get all excited about serving in an internship opportunity to only realize a couple of weeks in that you have “bitten off more than you can chew.” As Jesus told his followers,

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish. (Luke 14:28-30, ESV)

Learning Potential

A fifth area to think about is the internship site’s potential for providing you with learning opportunities. As I have been saying throughout this book, this is your internship and your development needs to be at the core of any great internship opportunity. An internship opportunity might sound glamorous and exciting, but ask yourself if this internship provides the significant on-the-job training you need? Does this internship provide a setting where appropriate resources are available for you to meet ministry and education goals? What experiences will be most useful in helping your candidacy for a job or academic admission? Does this internship opportunity harmonize with your vocational intent? Does this internship provide chances to develop leadership and decision making skills? And does this internship provide occasions for theological reflection?

Mentor and People

A sixth area of deliberation involves the other people at the internship site. In regards to who your mentor or supervisor will be at the internship site, ask yourself what are the personal qualities of a supervisor that you think you would work with best? What personality styles might challenge you but help you learn? And does this internship opportunity provide for competent and beneficial supervision?

In regards to the other people besides the mentor at the internship site, consider these questions. Does this internship opportunity allow you to relate to other people at all? An internship doing research in the basement of a building might get tiring after awhile. And are there any other interns with whom you would particularly like to work with?

Compensation

A natural question in dealing with internship site selection is the question of compensation. Money should never be the deciding factor in whether to take an internship position or not, but you do have financial obligations to meet. At the same time, do not overlook the volunteer or low-paying internship positions. Many times these smaller settings are just what is needed in your development.

Saleem Assaf and Rosanne Lurie put compensation in perspective with the following insight on secular internships, but the truth holds for theological internships as well:

The bottom line is that you probably shouldn't expect to get wealthy from your internship, no matter the field you are pursuing. Should you accept an internship that doesn't seem financially rewarding? Pride can sometimes hold you back. Particularly when that pride keeps you from accepting an opportunity to acquire some fantastic, or even moderate, experience because no pay is involved. . . . The wider the gap, the more willing you should be to work without pay in order to get the kind of experience that will build a bridge across your career gap.¹

These and other honest questions to consider in deciding on any internship site are listed in the following table. As part of the intentionality of the internship, make sure to work your way through these questions.

¹ Saleem Assaf and Rosanne Lurie, *The Wetfeet Insider Guide to Getting Your Ideal Internship* (San Francisco: WetFeet, 2003), 13-14.

Internship Selection Checklist

School Requirements	<input type="checkbox"/> What are the specific internship requirements of your school? <input type="checkbox"/> Have you spoken to the academic instructor who oversees internships at your school?
Previous Field Experience	<input type="checkbox"/> What previous field experience have you had?
Academic or Skills Training	<input type="checkbox"/> What coursework or skills training would be relevant to an internship? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this internship opportunity give you a chance to apply and test your education?
Time	<input type="checkbox"/> How much time can you realistically allocate to this placement each week? <input type="checkbox"/> Does your school schedule allow you to take this internship opportunity at this time? <input type="checkbox"/> Is your family able to support your internship opportunity?
Learning Opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/> Does this internship provide the significant on-the-job training you need? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this internship provide a setting where appropriate resources are available for you to meet ministry and education goals? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this internship provide chances to develop leadership and decision making skills? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this internship provide occasions for theological reflection?
Supervision Style and Personality	<input type="checkbox"/> What personal qualities of a supervisor do you think you would work with best? <input type="checkbox"/> What personality styles might challenge you but help you learn? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this internship opportunity provide competent supervision?
Vocational Path	<input type="checkbox"/> What experiences will be most useful in helping your candidacy for a job or academic admission? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this internship opportunity harmonize with your vocational intent?
Peers	<input type="checkbox"/> Does this internship opportunity allow you to relate to other people? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there any other interns with whom you would particularly like to work with?
Compensation	<input type="checkbox"/> Do I need my travel, education, or other expenses covered by an internship? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this internship opportunity meet your needs for compensation?

Concurrent and Block Placement

One final note on internship site selection has to do with the logistics of time for the internship. Most schools grant students the option of doing their internship “full-time” as a block placement (typically in the summer months) or “part-time” as a concurrent placement (typically

during the normal school year). Block placements and concurrent placements have advantages and disadvantages.²

Concurrent Placement

Concurrent placement occurs when you are serving in a ministry setting part-time (around 10 hours a week) during the school year while attending classes full-time. For example, this could be the student who works as a part-time youth minister at a local church while going to school full time. One advantage to this type of situation is that there is better integration of the classroom experience with ministry experience. Most likely, what you are learning on Thursday in class, you are using on Sunday at the church. Another advantage is that (for better or for worse) you are forced to learn time management skills, having to balance school life and ministry life. All of life is a balancing act. The sooner you are able to have some sense of balancing the many demands of life, the better.

Finally, concurrent placement gives you the advantage to see ministry develop over a long term period. With block placement (which I will discuss in just a minute), you are only at a location for ten weeks or so. With concurrent placement, you have an entire year to see ministry develop and for relationships to be built. And many times in local concurrent placements, the opportunities to minister continue long after the official internship has ended.

Nevertheless, with these advantages are disadvantages as well. Trying to balance school and an internship is stressful on both ends. When you are trying to do both things at the same time, you will possibly feel guilty because of the time limitations at the ministry site. For instance, if you are serving as a part-time youth minister at a local church, you will always want to be able to spend more time with the kids but you cannot because of the school demands. At the same time, you will want to be able to focus more on your academic work but will feel pulled by the demands of the internship.

Another disadvantage of this type of concurrent placement is that you might not feel fully integrated with the ministry staff where you are serving. Unlike the full-time staff, you will not be able to attend all of the meetings because of your class schedule. You might miss out on planning days or certain discussions because you are just not up at the ministry location during the week.

Block Placement

Block placement is where you serve full-time in a ministry setting during a block of time (usually the summer but maybe even a semester) while not attending classes. While the concurrent placement example was where you would be serving as a part-time youth minister at a local church while going to school full time. With a block placement, you might work full time at a local church as their summer Youth Minister. On the other hand, you might travel to another part of the country to serve in a full time capacity in an internship location.

² Ronald Hornecker, "Choosing a Ministry Placement and Field Supervisor," in *Experiencing Ministry Supervision*, ed. William T. Pyle and Mary Alice Seals (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 24-25, George I Hunter, *Theological Field Education* (Newton Centre, MA: The Boston Theological Institute, 1977), 11-15.

The advantage of block placement is that you will get full ministry immersion. For those ten weeks or for that semester, you are fully engaged in ministry at the internship site. Unlike the concurrent placement, you are not having to juggle classes and the internship. With block placement, you have freedom from the educational demands. Finally, in a block placement you will have a better opportunity for integration with the ministry staff where you are serving.

However, as with concurrent placement, there are disadvantages with block placement as well. One disadvantage is that there is a detachment of the academic life and the ministry experience. Unlike the concurrent placement where there is the potential of immediate application of what you have just learned in class, that immediacy is missing during the school year in a block placement situation. Another disadvantage is that block placement is logistically more difficult to set up, especially if you are a married student. You have to ask yourself if you will be able to support yourself and your family financially if you take a summer internship. If the internship site for the block placement is out of town, how will you deal with moving your family for the summer? And once the block placement internship is over, how do you transition back into the normal school routine.

Internship Placement Options

Type of placement	Definition	Advantages	Disadvantages
Concurrent placement	Serving in a ministry setting part-time (around 10 hours a week) during the school year while attending classes full-time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The student is forced to learn time management skills, having to balance school life and ministry life ▪ Better integration of the classroom experience with ministry experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Possible feelings of guilt about time limitations at the ministry site (wanting to spend more time at the church but cannot) ▪ Not feeling fully integrated with the ministry staff where serving ▪ Stress to academic life
Block placement	Serving full-time in a ministry setting (usually the summer) while not attending classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ministry immersion ▪ Freedom from educational demands ▪ Better integration with the ministry staff where serving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Detachment of the academic life and the ministry experience ▪ Hard adjustment coming back to the routine of academia

So Which is Best?

So do I recommend a concurrent or a block placement? Well, it depends. Some of it depends on your personality. Can you juggle multiple demands simultaneously or would you rather like to concentrate on one thing at a time? Some of it depends on finances. Can you afford to take a summer or a semester off from work in order to pursue a block placement internship opportunity? Likewise, can you afford to fulfill a concurrent placement internship opportunity

and pay your bills? Some of it depends on your family situation. Does your husband or wife want to move across the country for the summer? Do you have small kids?

Is also depends on the opportunities. If you are wanting to do an internship in the movie industry but are going to a seminary in the Midwest, you will probably need to be willing to go to either the California or New York to get a beneficial internship. If you are wanting to be a military chaplain, Uncle Sam will probably be telling you where you will be doing your internship. If your heart is for missions, you will probably want to be overseas for the summer.

I have seen both block placements and concurrent placements work fantastically. As I related my story at the first of this book, I did a nine-month internship 1000 miles away from my home and school. That year that I took off from school was one of the most important decisions I ever made. At the same time, I have personally supervised interns at my church that have had life changing experiences in a concurrent internship placement.

Therefore, as I said, it depends. I would encourage you to developing a discerning heart and seek the wisdom of others in helping to arrive at you decision.