THE UNIVERSITY
of **NORTH CAROLINA**
at **CHAPEL HILL**

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM   T 919.962.0425
KNAPP-SANDERS BUILDING   F 919.962.8271
CAMPUS BOX 3330   www.mpa.unc.edu
CHAPEL HILL, NC 27599-3330

Greetings from Carolina MPA,

As part of Carolina MPA students' pursuit towards an MPA degree, students at UNC-Chapel Hill must hold a professional work experience (PWE). The PWE plays an essential role in helping students gain exposure to the practical application of MPA coursework while also providing public organizations, such as yours, with additional support to help meet current organizational needs.

Carolina's MPA program educates students to serve in local, state, and federal governments as well as the nonprofit sectors, making our students poised to:

- Analyze organizations and environments from multiple perspectives, acting upon the audiences needs
- Identify legal and ethical implications of social equity and diversity
- Write clearly and concisely on multiple platforms
- Give organized and convincing, live, and virtual, oral presentations
- Identify, collect, manage, and interpret qualitative and quantitative data
- Design and conduct appropriate research

For our on-campus students, PWEs are traditionally completed during the spring and summer months, extending over a 10-week period for a total of 400 hours, whereas students from our online format complete PWEs at varying timepoints throughout the year with most, completing PWEs in a part-time capacity for a period of 15-weeks. We welcome your support in contributing to the professional development of these future public leader.

As a benefit to hosting one of our MPA student, you will gain access to the Carolina MPA Resume Book, a curation of resumes from our second-year students and alumni. The MPA program will also offer support in marketing job announcements to eligible students, student application collection, and scheduling of interviews with selected applicants. **Submit your interest in being connected to one of our talented MPA students.**

For your reference, I have attached a copy of *Elements of a Successful Professional Work Experience*, as past Employers hosts have found it to be useful. Additionally, you will find materials on facilitating meaningful remote internship.

Thank you in advance for helping our MPA students complete their graduation requirements. I am confident that you will find them enthusiastic and capable of making lasting contributions to your organization and community. I encourage you to reach out with any questions or concerns and to follow us on LinkedIn - UNC Master of Public Administration (MPA).

Sincerely,

Kristin Pawlowski
Associate Director Alumni & Employer Relations,
MPA Program

PROFESSIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE
Connecting Employers to MPA Student Talent

The Carolina MPA program attracts students who share a passion for public service and capacity for leadership. Employers who work with students in the Carolina MPA program have access to students who are critical thinkers and problem solvers. MPA students can provide staffing for projects that might not otherwise be completed, and employers can invest in a future colleague in the field.

Many of our students choose Carolina because they are interested in practical scholarship and experience. Before beginning the internship, students have completed six MPA core courses. These courses focus on specific competencies, including organizational analysis, public service values, project management, critical thinking, and administrative writing. They have also completed at least one "real-world" project for a government or nonprofit organization.

The Purpose of the PWE

The PWE is an opportunity for students to apply theory to practice in a professional setting that allows students to further develop their competencies in public administration and lay the groundwork for career advancement. It is our recommendation that students are paid for their work.

Employer Guidelines: The PWE is a full or part-time work agreement between a Carolina MPA student and Employer. Students are expected to work either full time (400 hours over a 10-week period) or part-time (300 hours over the course of 15 weeks).

- The work should be substantive in nature
- The work must be public service related and consist of complex, specialized work demonstrating competence in key areas of public administration
- The PWE must be supervised by a qualified professional who is able to monitor student progress and provide feedback on student performance

Elements of Success

Employers are especially important in helping MPA degree candidates integrate classroom learning with professional work assignments. We have found that the most successful PWE opportunities contain the following elements:

1. **Opportunities to develop and hone multiple skills**, such as analysis, writing, and oral communication. This suggests that a variety of projects is preferable or, in the alternative, one project that challenges students to use multiple skills. Having multiple tasks also develops time management skills. Ideally, there should be some mix between working independently and working in groups. Another important skill is learning how to function within an organization; opportunities to work on projects that involve interaction with other staff and external partners of the organization is beneficial. It is also beneficial for the student be given an opportunity to learn about the entire organization, including its mission and current projects, not just the specific department or area to which the student is assigned.

2. **A supervisor who is willing to be a coach.** This means the supervisor welcomes the student to join meetings, lets the student observe various projects and events, and engages in reflective conversation with the student on student's evaluation of those events. Supervisor is willing to explore issues in public service with the student and expose the student to all aspects of a job as if the student were a regular employee.

3. **Adequate work facilities** and/or needed resources for remote work. The student should have a comfortable space in which to work and/or appropriate technologies to work remotely. This does not mean a private office, necessarily, but an appropriate space with a decent computer is essential to a productive experience. Remote working arrangements are acceptable.

4. **Opportunities for the student to speak in front of groups** (e.g., managers, clients, or public officials) and respond to questions.

5. **An environment in which student feels empowered to ask question**, substantive as well as those related to career guidance and advice.

6. **Clear expectations communicated as early as possible** (even before work starts). The Employment Contract helps to memorialize expectations related to responsibilities and duties of the student's role; however, employers are also encouraged to engage in communication related to acceptable work schedules, dress, and modes of communications.

7. **Regular feedback**—e.g., a periodic meeting to assess not only progress on projects, but also to assess work relationships and performance strengths and weaknesses. This also includes a formal feedback session at the end of the professional work experience, in which the supervisor recognizes accomplishments and skills and identifies what can be improved.

8. **The chance to participate in fieldwork, conferences, and other interactions beyond student's immediate work responsibilities** can be beneficial.

For additional information, contact Kristin Pawlowski, MPA Associate Director of Alumni and Employer Relations, UNC-School of Government, by email at: pawlowski@sog.unc.edu or phone: 919.966.4159.

COVID-19 introduced many professional settings to the reality of a remote work environment. An absence of alternative options forced many professionals to adapt and adjust. As many professional sectors continue to evaluate the relationship between remote workspaces and organizational, staff, and community needs, organizations must remain committed to developing a future workforce of individuals attuned to the rapidly changing work environments.

Internships play an essential role in helping students gain professional development and exposure to an industry or field.[i] Student interns spend their time working on relevant projects, learning about the field, making industry connections, and developing both hard and soft skills, creating as much of a learning experience for the student as support to help meet the needs of your organization.

RESPONSIBILITIES & DUTIES OF AN INTERN

Candidates for Master of Public Administration program at UNC-Chapel Hill develop a robust array of skills through courses ranging from management, leadership, to public policy analysis and project evaluation. Carolina's MPA program educates leaders to serve in both local, state, and federal governments and the nonprofit and private sectors. After just a year of coursework our students are poised to:

- Analyze organizations and environments from multiple perspectives, acting upon the audiences needs
- Identify legal and ethical implications of social equity and diversity
- Write clearly and concisely on multiple platforms
- Give organized and convincing, live, and virtual, oral presentations
- Identify, collect, manage, and interpret qualitative and quantitative data
- Design and conduct appropriate research

While there is not a singular format for an internship, we have observed organizations to structure internships in one of two formats: rotational experiences or project-specific work.

- **Rotational** - Immersive experience wherein the intern rotates across organizational department, within each for a defined period. After gaining exposure to each function area, the intern self-selects one department with which to work on a tangible deliverable for the remainder of the internship.

- **Project-specific** – An intern is recruited to work on one specific project or organizational initiative

Sample project ideas follow:

- Designing and administering the survey and analyzing the response data.
- Climate-based surveys and development of evaluation measures
- Assistance with procurement and administration of grants
- Support COVID-related response efforts and programming
- Educational/Training development programming, evaluation, marketing, and programmatic support.
- Donor stewardship
- Organizational assessment

We encourage employers to begin by consider unique organizational needs and to work with University partners to identify how MPA candidates can help meet the demands.

COMPENSATION

MPA students are poised to perform meaningful work and make valuable contribution to your organization. While not required, it is encouraged that students receive reasonable compensation for their efforts. Compensation can be structured in the form of a stipend or at an hourly rate; during 2019-2020, the median salary was $11.68.[ii]

For organizations with limited budgets, consider allocating intern funding into newly received grants or intern-share with a neighboring organization, industry partner(s), or cross-functional departments. Keep in mind that a nominal investment in a student today, will directly benefit the community at large.

POSTING A POSITION

There is great variance between how organizations manage the administrative aspects of hiring an intern. We have observed internships being structured as temporary positions, part-time positions, and contract-based work engagements. It is encouraged that you work directly with your Human Resource Department to structure your internship position in a manner that is most supportive of your organization's administrative practices. There is no rule, do what works best for your organization.

To attract the best talent, it is important to create a job description which clearly defines who you are and the scope of work which the intern will complete. At a minimum, the internship announcement should include:
- A description of your organization (consider including your mission, values, geographic presence)

- Indication of your recruitment need
- Internship Description (include position title, principle projects, assignments, or responsibilities)
- Required or preferred skills, knowledge, and abilities
- Compensation
- Job location (indicate whether the role can be completed remotely)
- Preferred Start - End Date
- Required Application Documents (resume, cover letter, transcript, writing sample)
- Primary recruitment point of contact

Many Universities, including Carolina MPA, hold structured recruitment events. It is advantageous to connect with University Employer Relations Teams as staff can offer support in creating internship announcements, facilitating resume collects, and in administering scheduling of interviews.

ORIENTATION

Welcoming an intern into your organization can be taxing, especially for those whose primary responsibilities do not include oversight of internship programs. A few best practices which can help your intern acclimate into your organization. Whether in-person or in a written document, share your organization's story; a brief historical overview of the events leading to the organization's formation; your current mission, strategic plan, and insight on key initiatives to support a seamless transition onto your team

Identify a member of your team who will serve as the intern's primary supervisor. The supervisor and intern should explore the relationship between the intern's role and current organization and department initiatives. The supervisor should set clear expectations -- What is your dress code policy? What hours do you expect the intern to work? What are preferred mediums for communication? Review the responsibilities and duties of the position with your new hire. Supervisors are encouraged to help the intern feel a part of the conversation, provide the intern with space to share insight on personal and professional goals and how they envision they can best support your organization's need. These small steps can help an intern feel confident and empowered to take ownership of their new role. Together, create a work plan for the internship engagement; this can be useful in ensuring that there is mutual understanding of responsibilities and duties. Finally, be sure to keep an open line of communication with your intern. We consistently hear that open channels of communication are key to successful working relationship. It is encouraged that you schedule weekly check-ins with your intern to ensure a smooth transition and progress towards defined goals.

ON BOARDING A REMOTE EMPLOYEE

While the thought of recruiting for a remote intern may seem unrealistic, internships are critical to the development of a future workforce poised to confront and manage societal needs. As professional sectors have grown comfortable working in virtual spaces, so to have graduate students. At the time of their applications, students will have already completed coursework on virtual platforms, making them accustomed and posed to engage with others through virtual modalities.

Offering remote internships also offers several benefits to employers and students alike. With the removal of geographic limitations, the talent pool is greatly broadened for employers; students have greater access to opportunities; and, there are increased opportunities for engage interns in activities where in the in-person environment, a seat would not have been made available to the intern.

Some best practices shared by past-supervisors who successfully on-boarded and oversaw remote interns:

1. **An introductory social-distanced meeting at one's principal place of business** – A mask-to-mask meeting can be useful in helping a new employee develop awareness of an organizations culture and the personality of a team and its members. If an in-person meeting is not feasible, be sure to set aside ample time for your new intern to be introduced to not only administrative processes and resources, but also time for introductions to team members and causally conversations.
2. **Establish personal connections** - Weekly check-ins can support the development of a relationship with your new intern; there need not be an agenda, the face-to-face check-in is invaluable. Social platforms such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, and Google Chat can be useful in replicable unscheduled conversations, and text and phone can offer some reprieve from the monotony of screen-time interactions.
3. **Mimic water cooler conversations** - Create online channels, blogs, etc. where staff can engage in conversations with one another. Be sure to include your intern to help them feel a part of the team.
4. **Create a meet-and-greet road map** - Facilitate the scheduling of virtual meetings with colleagues and identify meetings and projects that your new hire can complete within the first month. Work with your IT professionals to create a virtual tour of the office setting.
5. **Remain flexible and encourage self-advocacy** - Partner with your new hire to better understand what type of support the intern needs from you and what degree of interaction is preferred.
6. **Spread the word** - Circulate a welcome email to members of cross-functional teams, sharing 2 professional and 1 personal fact about your new intern.

Pawlowski, Kristin | MPA Associate Director for Alumni & Employer Relations– UNC Chapel Hill, School of Government

7. **Welcome event** - Encourage staff to facilitate a virtual welcome event to help your intern feel a part of the team. You might also consider sending a welcome package to your intern's primary residence.
8. **Clear expectations** - Flexible work schedules are becoming the norm - to avoid conflict, establish clear expectations for work hours, dress, and modes of communications.
9. **Be Inclusive -** Include your new hire in office meetings, empowering them to share updates on their own work and experiences.
10. **Dual-perspectives -** Include another team member in the intern's on-board events - having the perspective of both an administrator and team member can help your intern make independent and informed decisions.

TACKLING BANWIDTH AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

As society has pivoted to virtual professional engagements, access to technological resources and reliable bandwidth has become even more essential for any employee to perform meaningful work. Many communities, face bandwidth-related challenges as well as concerns of exposing one's organization to cyber vulnerability. While not ideal, a unique approach observed was to provide the intern a USB with materials related to projects on which the individual would contribute over the course of the work engagement; the supervisor and intern arranged a schedule and process for providing updated materials as the work experience progressed. Google docs, Sharepoint, and Microsoft Teams are other platforms which organizations can explore. Employers are also encouraged to work with University partners to explore specific challenge and University resources that may be able to be provided to the student for the duration of the internship.

CREATING COMMUNITY VIRTUALLY

An online environment can make it difficult for anyone, let alone an intern, to feel connected to others. While there is still a lot to be learned, we encourage you to not strictly limit interactions with your intern to work related matters. A few effective approaches shared from NC local governments.

The Town of Cary employs a variety of online opportunities for keeping employees connected, including The Joy Channel (for spreading positivity), #CaryStrong to give shoutouts to various projects, and the Weekly Virtual Article Club, where a facilitator leads an article discussion over important topics, whether masks, mental health, or inequality.[iii]

The City of Lexington is using Zoom to foster candid discussions about working from home, the challenges, and opportunities, in light of different workstyles, coupled with periodic in-person socially distanced team meetings outside in parks. Some resources they find valuable:

- [Primer on Managing Remote Employees](#)

Pawlowski, Kristin | MPA Associate Director for Alumni & Employer Relations– UNC Chapel Hill, School of Government

- [Motivating Remote Employees](#)

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Government invites all staff and faculty to join Mindfulness sessions on Friday mornings. Additionally, the School's leadership team facilitates weekly hour-long Town Hall meetings with all staff and faculty, which have been instrumental in keeping all staff and faculty apprised of COVID related updates and in building cross-functional relationships.

Other creative ideas include virtual conferences with built-in team reflective activities; ice cream socials where all staff receive one common topping, independently building sundaes, and coming together to share creations and catch-up with peers; virtual photo-booths; and online cooking classes. Seek guidance from your teams, remain flexible, and have fun being creative.

---

[i] Gerlach, John D., and Tyler P. Reinagel. "Experiential Learning in MPA Programs: A Case for Complementarity between Internship and Service-Learning Requirements." *PS, Political Science & Politics*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2016, pp. 132-138.

[ii] This is reflective of internships completed in Local, State, Non-Profit, and Private Sectors. The median by sector for the 2019-2020 academic year was: Local $13.70; Private $7.80; State $15.50; Non-Profit $9.70.

[iii] Dehart-Davis, Leisha, "Pro Bono Employee Survey, Addressing COVID Stress, Innovation Lab," Sept. 28, 2020.