

8-1-2008

## Student Internships in Extension: Strategies for Success for the Agent and the Student

Carolyn S. Wilken

*University of Florida*, [cswilken@ufl.edu](mailto:cswilken@ufl.edu)

Brenda C. Williams

*University of Florida*, [bcwilliams@email.ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:bcwilliams@email.ifas.ufl.edu)

Norma Cadavieco

*University of Florida*, [normi@ufl.edu](mailto:normi@ufl.edu)

D Katey Walker

*Kansas State University*, [kateyw213@aol.com](mailto:kateyw213@aol.com)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

---

### Recommended Citation

Wilken, C. S., Williams, B. C., Cadavieco, N., & Walker, D. (2008). Student Internships in Extension: Strategies for Success for the Agent and the Student. *The Journal of Extension*, 46(4), Article 26. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol46/iss4/26>

This Tools of the Trade is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact [kokeefe@clemson.edu](mailto:kokeefe@clemson.edu).



August 2008 // Volume 46 // Number 4 // Tools of the Trade // 4TOT3



## Student Internships in Extension: Strategies for Success for the Agent and the Student

### Abstract

The Extension internship provides a valuable learning experience for the agent and the intern. The intern receives a lesson in "real-world-learning"; for many agents, supervising an intern is an opportunity to update their knowledge and skills. Too often the intern and the agent are not a good match, leaving both parties dissatisfied and disappointed. This article offers three perspectives of the internship experience, that of the agent, the intern, and campus supervisor. We offer suggestions for strategies agents can use to enhance the internship experience for all involved and remind the reader that internships are an excellent recruiting tool.

### Carolyn S. Wilken

Associate Professor and Extension Specialist  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, Florida  
[cswilken@ufl.edu](mailto:cswilken@ufl.edu)

### Brenda C. Williams

FCS Agent III  
Alachua County / IFAS Extension  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, Florida  
[bcwilliams@email.ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:bcwilliams@email.ifas.ufl.edu)

### Norma Cadavieco

M.S. Candidate  
Family, Youth, and Community Sciences  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, Florida  
[normi@ufl.edu](mailto:normi@ufl.edu)

### D. Katey Walker

Professor Emeritus  
Kansas State University  
Pompano Beach, Florida  
[Kateyw213@aol.com](mailto:Kateyw213@aol.com)

Congratulations! You have been offered the opportunity to have a student intern for the summer to work with you on your Extension programs. The Extension internship provides a valuable learning experience for both the intern and the agent. For the student, the internship provides a setting where they can implement the philosophy and teaching methods of non-formal education as it becomes a lesson in "real-world-learning"; for many agents, supervising an intern serves as a refresher course in the theories and principles of non-formal education as well as an opportunity to update their own knowledge and skills. Thus, the internship experience becomes beneficial to both the agent and the intern.

### Purpose

All too frequently, student interns are placed in county Extension offices without sufficient consideration of the needs of both the intern and the county agent. This article presents county agents with a strategy for selecting, working with, and learning from student interns. Interns who

have a positive learning experience are a valuable resource to the agent and may become interested in a career as county agent.

## From the Agent's Perspective

Having an Extension intern can be a valuable opportunity for the agent to supplement current programming, introduce new programs, and refresh technological skills. To create an internship experience that is meaningful to all parties, the agent must first clarify goals and expectations for all concerned. Keep in mind that if the agent's goals are for filing and office tasks, then another kind of helper is needed; interns expect and have been prepared for a professional experience where they can apply their knowledge and skills to a meaningful educational program.

Table 1 provides an example of typical expectations an agent might have and related strategies for choosing an intern that best meets these criteria. Note that the strategies require input from both the agent and the student and culminate in a personal interview to best determine an appropriate match. Selecting an intern requires time and consideration on the part of the agent to assure that supervising an intern is rewarding in many ways.

**Table 1.**  
Expectations and Strategies for Selecting an Intern

Expectations	Strategies
Clearly stated goals for internship	Ask student for written statement of goals. Ask student's campus supervisor for academic goals and expectations for the internship.
Subject matter knowledge	Review intern applicant's transcripts
Creativity and resourcefulness	Examine intern's projects (for classes and other activities).
Willingness to collaborate	Ask about group project or teamwork experiences in interview.
Initiative and enthusiasm	Observe in interview.
Technology skills	Ask student to rate their own skills in Word, PowerPoint, and Excel projects.
Writing ability	Request examples.
Work place readiness	Review student's resume.
Other expectations related to agent's specific situation	To be determined by the agent

## From the Intern's Perspective

While the agent is preparing to choose an intern, potential interns are writing their own goals and formulating their own expectations. The internship is a critical and exciting time for students as they will "finally" have an opportunity to leave campus for a professional experience. Students work closely with their campus supervisors to identify and prepare for a rewarding internship. Their primary goals are reflected in their desire to make a meaningful contribution while advancing their knowledge and experience in a professional context.

The majorities of interns are nearing graduation and use the internship experience to apply their academic training for anticipated careers. In addition, they want to enhance their career exploration and networking skills as they begin the transition from classes to careers. More than anything, interns hope to enter an environment where they are given an opportunity to work as new professionals rather than student helpers. Table 2 provides an example of typical expectations a student might have and related strategies for choosing an internship that best meets these criteria.

**Table 2.**  
Expectations and Strategies for Selecting an Internship Site

Expectations	Strategies
Know the parameters of the internship experience.	Establish overall goals and specific project goals and deadlines.
Be treated as a new professional.	Explain office protocol. Provide designated workspace and access to equipment.
Do "real" work.	Assign specific and meaningful activities and responsibilities.

Be respected for their knowledge.	Provide opportunities to apply knowledge.
Receive guidance and assistance in achieving quality.	Regularly review and discuss intern's work in progress.
Receive guidance in professional development.	Discuss state and national professional organizations.
Learn about professional and career opportunities.	Introduce intern to county and district Extension administrators to discuss careers in Extension.
Other expectations related to intern's specific interests and situation	To be determined jointly by the agent and intern

Following are just a few examples of the work students have completed as interns:

- Write newsletter articles
- Develop and implement new program
- Teach 4-H campers
- Revise existing programs and update PowerPoints
- Coordinate groups of volunteers
- Conduct research for program development
- Develop evaluation tools for specific program(s)
- Write media spots
- Do radio interview

## **From the Campus Perspective**

Academic programs vary in how they manage the internship process. While the internship supervisor plays a pivotal role in the Extension internship experience, the academic advisor is equally critical in preparing students for internships in Extension. It is extremely helpful if the academic advisor or campus supervisor can identify students who are interested in non-formal, community-based education and guide them to internship and career opportunities in Cooperative Extension. The internship supervisor, who may or may not be the academic advisor, coordinates the internship experience with the agent and student assisting both in preparing for success. The supervisor acts as a liaison between the agent and intern and is responsible for monitoring the academic requirements of the internship.

An intern can be a valuable asset to county agents and their programs. They bring current research-based knowledge and the latest in technology, as well as energy and enthusiasm to the county. Furthermore, internships are a successful strategy for recruiting new professionals into the Cooperative Extension system.

## **Suggestions for Further Reading**

DiMaria, F. (2006). Service learning attracts a new kind of student. *The Hispanic Outlook on Higher Education*, 16, 24-26.

Jordan, P., Phillips, M., & Brown, E. (2004). We train teachers: Why not supervisors and mentors?. *The Physical Educator*, 61(4), 219-221.

Rogers, B., Mason, K., & Cornelius, J. (2001). Involving undergraduate students as Extension program interns. *Journal of Extension*[On-line], 39(5). Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2001october/iw4.html>

Scheer, S. D., Ferrari, T. M., Earnest, G. W., & Connors, J. J. (2006). Preparing Extension professionals: The Ohio State University's model of Extension education. *Journal of Extension*[On-line], 44(4) Article 4FEA1. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2006august/a1p.shtml>

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#)