



Consider this.

Internships are undoubtedly beneficial for students and job seekers to gain access to the job world. In a tough economy, there are multiple factors to consider when pursuing an internship, paid or unpaid – such as financial, ethical, and legal aspects.

Ask yourself if you can afford an unpaid internship, even if it's just for experience. Remember, you'll still have living expenses to take care of during that time. Also, ask yourself if you can afford not to do an internship. Employers demand experience, and internships help you gain that experience.

Also, be aware there are employers who think of interns as free laborers and hand out menial tasks rather than help you gain job-specific experience. Keep in mind that you are unlikely to receive health or employment benefits usually given to employees.

Some employers insist students earn college credit rather than pay. Always look into your department's internship program and how credits would or would not be applied before agreeing to this.

The law's the law.

The Fair Labor Standards Act under the U.S Department of Labor lists six criteria that can help you determine whether you should be considered an unpaid intern or an intern who receives minimum wage and overtime. If all six criteria aren't met, by law, companies

must pay the intern. Keep in mind that not every employer is aware of nor understands the law.

Here are the six current requirements that must be met in order for an employer to consider you an unpaid intern:

- The training, even though it occurs at and uses the company's sites and facilities, must be similar to what you could pay for and receive elsewhere at a vocational or academic institution.
- The training is truly for *your* benefit.
- You do not replace or displace regular employees, and you must be under direct supervision.
- The employer training you gains no advantage from your work. In fact, at times your work may even interfere with the company's operations.
- You understand that your training does not in any way guarantee you a job at the end of your internship.
- Both you and the employer understand and agree that you are not entitled to pay during the time of your training.

Depending upon your needs and situation, you may come to the conclusion that working for experience, rather than pay, is best.

Remember, you can always look around for a job later on – after you've bulked up your résumé a bit.

Internships: Paid vs. Unpaid

Weighing your internship options.

Simply put:

When considering an internship, know your rights and consider the following:

- Will you be paid or receive school-approved credit?
- Can you afford not to be paid?
- Can you afford to graduate without gaining experience?
- Will the experience you gain be relevant to your future job search?
- How many hours do you expect/will you be expected to work?
- Will you need to submit a report at the end?
- Do other opportunities exist?
- Will your responsibilities increase your learning experience?

The choice is yours.

Because internships can play such an important role in your job search, make it a point to think things through thoroughly. Seek out a career counselor at your college for more information and to help decide which path is right for you.

There are a plethora of organizations that will provide the experience you need to build your résumé, as well as internships that pay in more than just experience.

So, it's your choice. Think long term, not just about the immediate moment.

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