

Internship Manual

FAQs

Internship Coordinators: Susan Underkoffler, MFS (sunderkoffler@ufl.edu)
Dr. Hayley Adams (hayleyradams@ufl.edu)

What is the role of the Internship Coordinators?

The internship coordinators' role is to guide students through the process of choosing appropriate career development opportunities to meet their goals through internships. We will meet virtually (via Zoom/Skype) with you one-on-one to discuss your interests and identify facilities and organizations in your geographic area that can provide opportunities pertaining to your goals. We will also work with you individually to facilitate learning throughout your internship and will coordinate with the professionals at your chosen organization to ensure that mutual expectations are met.

Once an organization is identified, the internship coordinators will work with you to prepare your application materials, contact the organization and make sure that the project on which you will be working is suitable for graduate level credit (this may require approval by the Chair of the Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Department) and we will ensure that any paperwork or contracts required by the site facility and University of Florida are completed and approved. We will monitor your progress throughout the duration of your internship by establishing and maintaining contact with at least one supervisor for whom you will be working and conducting weekly check-ins with that person. We may require biweekly progress reports from the supervisor.

Who should pursue an internship?

Students who are interested in gaining hands-on experience in conservation, ecology or wildlife management field work, animal care or zoo work, or laboratories (forensic or otherwise), should attempt to complete an internship. An internship can provide you with experience and skills needed to be competitive in these fields and that may not be attainable via a strictly online academic program. Students who have prior volunteer experience are highly encouraged to take this course, as this background will provide you with an edge in securing an internship. Most students have at least one volunteer or professional experience prior to landing an internship. Students who are already working in a conservation field and are pursuing the Wildlife Forensic Sciences and Conservation degree for career advancement may not need an internship.

How do I get started?

At least one semester prior to when you would like to start your internship, contact either Susan and/or Dr. Adams via email and explain briefly your areas of interest and possible goals. If you

know of an organization near you with which you would like to intern, let us know. In your email, include the following:

- Describe your academic/professional goals
- Explain how an internship would support your goals
- Describe any prior research, volunteer or internship activities
- Name of organization you are interested in interning with (if known) and whether or not they have an internship program in place (if known)
- Include your resume/curriculum vitae (CV)

We will then schedule a time to meet online and discuss further. The process of identifying opportunities and securing placement is a lengthy process; the sooner you contact us, the better. The planning process will require multiple meetings between internship coordinator(s) and student. Your internship must be approved by the internship coordinator prior to registering for the course.

If possible, you should take the course WIS____, *Professional Communication in Wildlife Forensic Sciences*, prior to beginning the process of locating an internship. This course will help you to improve writing skills, refine your resume or CV and cover letter to show transferable skills, and build skills to network.

How do I register for the Internship course?

Your internship must be approved by the internship coordinator. Once approved, you can be registered for the Internship course. For students who may be interning over several terms, consult with the internship coordinator(s) to determine when it is appropriate to register for credit. Note that the internship is a class and does require a certain level of time, skill development, and professional growth, just as any other course.

How will I receive credit for the internship?

The amount of credits you receive will be dependent on scope of the research or work effort, as well as agreement between the internship coordinator, internship site advisor, and the student. Therefore, it requires some thought by all parties prior to registration about how much credit is appropriate.

What is the goal of the Internship course?

Students gain professional-level skills and references to support them in seeking jobs after graduation and advance professionally on your chosen career track. Conservation, wildlife sciences and wildlife forensic science are all hands-on professions and an internship can be essential to gain hands-on experience. Employers do not usually ask for or rely on academic transcripts; they ask for your resume, and an internship helps you build your qualifications and develop a local professional network to obtain job referrals. The experience must have enough depth and breadth that by the end of the experience, you can perform professional-level tasks in your chosen field without supervision.

What types of organizations would be suitable to work with?

The organization you choose to work for should be aligned with your specific area of interest and must have a demonstrated record of success in this field, either through published, peer-reviewed research, accreditation in the field, a long track record of success, fully realized projects with successful outcomes, past work with interns/an established internship program, etc. It must be an organization with a clear focus that demonstrates transparency. Organizations may have to be approved either by the UF College of Medicine or the Wildlife Ecology and Conservation department.

How long do I have to complete the internship?

The length of time it takes to complete the internship will vary with the position and the time you have to commit to the internship. Some internships are short-term, while others can span multiple semesters.

What will an internship look like?

Internships can be paid, seasonal positions lasting one or two semesters, un-paid (volunteer) part-time positions, or short-term full-time positions. It all depends on the organization's needs and your goals and availability. You may be working in an office-type environment, in the field, or in a laboratory.

Will I be compensated monetarily?

Internships may be volunteer or paid. Internships designed to accommodate a student's schedule will generally require volunteering. Internships that accommodate an employer's schedule may be paid.

What if I can't find an internship near me?

The internship coordinators are available to help you every step of the way, even outside of the class, to learn the skills to locate or create an internship. While we can't guarantee an internship, we will do everything we can to assist in your placement. It is best if you develop a specific strategy to pursue (e.g., identify the organization, supervisor, skill sets, network, or project that will advance you on a chosen career track). Stay in contact with the internship coordinator throughout the process. Don't wait until you are frustrated. One of the best ways to find internship opportunities is to attend a state-level conference attended by local professionals who are working in an area of career interest. Often a student meets a professional at the conference who then offers them the opportunity to gain experience and develop an internship.

Can I pursue an internship in another location or overseas?

Although we encourage you to find something within your geographic area, if you choose to pursue an internship in a different location, please be aware that you will be responsible for all costs associated with travel, housing, and food, among other expenses. That said, we will certainly work with you to find a suitable opportunity. Dr. Adams has many years of experience placing students in internships and externships in multiple locations across the globe. However,

you must be very certain that you are capable of handling all the responsibilities that come not only with traveling and working in an unfamiliar environment, but with maintaining professionalism and meeting academic expectations as well. Be aware that preparations for this type of internship take much planning; you must notify the internship coordinator(s) of your interest in a foreign internship or placement in a different geographic location preferably two semesters prior to when you would like to take the course.

Can a student be paid or working in a paid position while getting internship credit?

Yes; seasonal biological jobs can be used for the intensive internship requirement. However, some students may not have the time or geographical flexibility to work in a paid seasonal position, so they have to develop a local volunteer position that provides entry-level skills similar to a paid position.

Can I pursue an internship the semester before graduation?

Yes, although it's a good idea to have your internship completed well before graduation, because 1) it may take some time to find one; 2) you may decide to pursue a topic introduced to you through your internship for a supervised research project; and 3) the duration of your internship may extend past one semester, which would prevent your graduation.

Do I have to pay tuition for the internship? Does financial aid cover the tuition for the internship?

The internship course is a course just like any other, and you register and pay tuition for them as you would your other courses. Similarly, if you are eligible for financial aid, the aid can be used to pay for the course. But there is no internal funding for any expenditures required, such as travel, and financial aid may not cover those.

What if I'm already volunteering?

The experience may or may not apply to the internship requirement. You would need to reach out to the internship coordinator to see how it might apply. Include the following in your email:

- Describe your academic/professional goals
- Share the internship or volunteer position description and/or brief summary of your duties
- Describe how the position supports your goals
- Include your resume/CV

The internship coordinators will reach out to you to further discuss the potential of your current duties and possible expansion into an internship.

Is it a good idea to log all volunteer/internship hours that are in the Fisheries and Wildlife field?

Yes, it is a good idea to log volunteer hours. In most instances, volunteer hours count as qualifying experience on job applications. The number of hours for work and volunteer experience is one aspect that federal and state agencies use when evaluating applications. For example, for two people with the exact same experience, the person who worked/volunteered 40

hours will rank lower than a person who completed 400 hours. Specific activities to include in your log are examples of leadership, accomplishments, any products you created, skills used relevant to fisheries and wildlife, and presentations/public speaking. For hours worked, log the hours volunteered per week, months, and years on average. Record your supervisor's contact name, email, and phone number.

Non-traditional students' frequently asked questions

Many students in the Wildlife Forensic Sciences and Conservation program are often juggling full-time jobs, children, pets, mortgages and other family and employment obligations with their education; most are not able to take seasonal jobs in distant locations like traditional (campus-based) students.

I am a non-traditional student with a family and work obligations; can I pursue an internship? How can I complete my internships when I work, parent and attend classes?

You need to decide whether you have the time available to commit to an internship, and you may have to do a lot of research and hunting to find one that will accommodate your schedule, but it is possible. You may be able to secure a part-time, volunteer position that is short- or long-term but that has the same impact on your resume as a full-time, paid position.

Flexible internship options that meet the internship requirements are accepted as long as they facilitate appropriate professional development. Internships may be completed in a short, intensive time period or over an extended period with less intensity each week or month. The internship coordinator helps you evaluate what is effective for your goals.

How can I be effective during my internship when I still have to work, parent and take courses?

It is imperative that you demonstrate high performance during internships. Some students may need to reduce or adjust their course load; some students may need "stop out" for a term of courses to do their internship. Be sure to establish a personal support system while balancing your internship with personal and professional responsibilities. Tell your work supervisor that you have additional academic responsibilities, arrange back-up child care, request support from family and friends, and update your academic advisor on your internship status.

Won't younger, traditional students outcompete me for internships and jobs?

No. Fish and wildlife biologists and conservation organizations as well as laboratories recognize the experience and maturity that non-traditional students generally bring. For this reason, they are often more willing to accommodate the flexible schedules of non-traditional students. Non-traditional students often use an internship as a way to demonstrate their employability with a local organization they want to work for in the future.

Are there any opportunities available for students who are homebound or who have limited mobility?

Some of the possibilities for internships when students have limited mobility are data management/analysis, report writing, lab work, Geographic Information Systems (e.g., mapping, remote sensing) and image (e.g., trail camera) analysis. There is also the communications/public relations aspect: science writing, designing brochures, and social media are a few examples.

Can I do something at my current job and have it qualify as an internship requirement?

It is possible to do work outside of your normal scope of duties within your current organization for an internship. You will need to consult with the internship coordinator and your employer to find out if this detail will meet the internship requirements.

Doesn't every professional want an intern?

No. It takes time to supervise an intern, so you will likely have to convince a supervisor that you are worth the time, even if you are volunteering. You have to determine how you can contribute your skills to benefit the organization and find a person with an appropriate skill set who is willing to mentor you.

I have always wanted to work in game or predator management, but where I live currently and where I will probably live in the future does not or likely will not offer very many of those jobs. A backup plan is to work at the local zoo. Should I try to do two internships, one for each career path?

One of the purposes of the internship is to try out a career path to see if it is a good fit for you. It would be in your best interest to do both as they require different skill sets, daily routines, missions, pay, education, etc. If you are already thinking of a backup plan, then you might want to start with that because you may find out that you do not like your back up plan. You may find you only want to do your first choice, and then will need to reevaluate your priorities. Another reason for gaining a variety of skills is that, despite our best plans, you never know where you will live or be willing to live, and you never know what jobs will be available in your area. You might be surprised with the opportunities available in your area. The work that you are interested in might fall under a different title or organization than you were expecting.