

# Establishing An Intern Program

*A Valuable Activity That Can Benefit the Student and Your Course*

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*USGA Green Section Record*

The role of the golf course superintendent has changed dramatically over the past 30 years. Not only has turfgrass management evolved into a very technical discipline, but the superintendent's role has expanded to include many responsibilities far removed from turf-related topics. These changes have created a seasonal demand for experienced workers within the golf course industry.

Turfgrass management students are helping to meet this demand. Many colleges and universities offering a turfgrass science curriculum make internships a requirement or elective for their programs. Internships can vary from being project-specific to an on-the-job training or apprenticeship. For project-specific internships, the students develop a plan of action for a particular project with the help of their academic advisor and the golf course superintendent for whom they will be working. The student completes a report upon returning to campus and is given academic credit for the experience.

The on-the-job training internships may or may not be for credit. Although there is no particular project to complete, the students usually have general guidelines to follow and certain goals to achieve.

Internships in either form can be of great benefit to both the student and the internship golf course to gain additional experience or to fill vacant supervisory positions. This hiring practice is usually successful because the graduate is familiar with the people and the operation and vice versa.

## Important Accommodations and Considerations For an Internship Program

The most important accommodation of an internship program is housing. The housing can be on- or off-site, although on-site housing is much more convenient and efficient. If housing is not provided, the intern must locate and secure housing before the employment begins and then must consider a lease, furniture and other necessities. Most students don't have the time during school to take care of all of these arrangements, especially if the golf course is a great distance from school. It's much easier for students to show up at the internship site with a trunk load of dirty laundry.

Other accommodations that courses can provide are meals, golfing privileges, limited or unlimited overtime and a competitive wage. The hourly wage is always an item for consideration but most interns do not make it the most important factor of their decision. They do, and rightfully so, contemplate the type and quality of experience that they are going to receive.

The superintendent can attract potential students by defining and developing an intern position within the management hierarchy. It is very important that management characterizes the intern position as one very different from a regular crew position. **If management does not utilize students differently from other seasonal employees, the turf students are really just seasonal employees.** Superintendents need to structure internships so that the students not only gain new knowledge and experience, but also contribute to the operation with their knowledge and experience.

Internship positions should have some level of responsibility associated with them. After all, most interns should only be a year or so from being in a position of responsibility. They should be put in a position that requires long hours and an on-call status. The interns should realize they will be the ones who will be expected to come in early, stay late or work weekends in order to get tasks completed.

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## Internships—

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Too many students have gravitated into assistant and superintendent positions believing the work week consists of 40 hours during the week and three hours on Saturday morning! When interns experience true-to-life working conditions, they have fewer surprises early in their careers.

Interns should also be involved in chemical and fertilizer applications to some extent. They should be far enough along in their education that they have a good understanding of equipment calibration and pesticide handling. Students should also be exposed to irrigation system operation and repair and water management philosophies and techniques. Interns also could spend a couple of days with a mechanic and in the shop to gain mechanical experience. All of the golf course management staff can provide educational opportunities for interns.

One thing that most interns are interested in is spending time with the golf course superintendent. They like to have the opportunity to discuss *why* things are being done or *how* things are being done. Students appreciate the opportunity to have good lines of communication between themselves and the upper-level management. It allows them to learn more and makes them feel like they are part of the team.

Interns can learn and benefit by being a part of another team as well. Many times golf courses rely on volunteers who are crew members from surrounding courses for tour-

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nament preparation. Allowing interns to work at local regional or national tournaments broadens their experience and gives them an opportunity to meet and work with other people in the industry.

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