

DEVELOPING A QUALITY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

From the GCSAA

How to meet the needs of both the student and the superintendent. A quality internship involves much more than working on a golf course. To be a valuable experience for both the student and the superintendent, goals and expectations must be aligned. The goal of a quality internship should be to provide a supervised work experience in order for students to build their expertise and proficiency in turf and grounds skills, as well as enhance their problem solving abilities. The internship structure should allow students to build skills, apply them to special problem solving situations and interact in at least one student/employer evaluation.

Beginning the Process

Although individual element of the internship program may differ from golf course to golf course, a strong program should include a number of elements. Most importantly, the program must be built around the educational experience of the student. Begin by writing a well-defined plan of activities and job tasks for the student intern. Be sure to include a broad spectrum of responsibilities, so the student gains a better understanding of overall golf course maintenance operation. Structure the internship so that the student not only gains knowledge and experience, but also contributes to the operation with their knowledge and experience.

A certain level of responsibility should be associated with the position. The intern should be put in a position that requires long hours and an on-call status. The intern should be made to realize that a typical golf course management is not 40 hours with a few extra hours on Saturdays. Too many students enter the profession or have gravitated into assistant and superintendents positions believing the work will consist of 40 hours during the week and three hours or so on Saturday mornings! When interns experience true-to-life working conditions, they have fewer surprises early in their careers.

Each intern will possess different capabilities and bring a different level of experience to the internship. Thus, any internship program must allow for customization and provide the best possible format to meet the needs of the

intern. A strategy to help your plan meet each intern's unique needs is to have the intern submit an outline of what they wish to accomplish.

When developing a program, consider timing. Some golf courses offer internships during the summer months only. A longer internship — for example over a six-month period — may provide a more rounded experience, exposing the student to important activities that occur during the other seasons.

When budgeting for an internship program, remember there are costs beyond hourly compensation. For example, many programs include housing and a bonus plan. When seeking an intern, do not limit your hiring strategy to considering only those students enrolled in a turfgrass program. A recent graduate of a program who is not quite ready for an assistant's position may make an excellent intern. It is important that the intern become more than a hired hand or cheap labor on your maintenance crew. The primary purpose of a good internship program should be to expose students to the practical side of golf course management so that students can tailor their education to best meet a realistic career path.

Practical experience helps students better understand classroom theories and information and how they are applied to real conditions on the golf course. It is also an excellent way to prepare for the transition from the classroom to the workplace. In addition, the internship allows students to develop personal contacts, which may lead to job placement opportunities and build self-confidence, leadership and good communication skills while working with others.

Since getting a job after graduation is usually the major goal for students, expand your internship program to help them with employment search skills. Set up mock interviews. Review and critique their résumé, being sure it gives prominence to the internship experience. Introduce them to other superintendents. Provide them with a list of networking contacts. Of course, a logical outcome of an internship program is to hire that student after graduation as an assistant. What better way is there to groom an assistant and have a legal sneak peek of their work ethic?