

Borough of Manhattan Community College Intern Handbook



**Intern Handbook:
BMCC/Cisco Systems, Inc. Internship Partner Program**

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Table of Contents

1. CREATING A SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP	4
1.1 What is an Internship?	4
1.2 What an Internship is Not	4
1.3 Top Ten Tips for Interns	4
1.4 Values Clarification	5
1.5 Starting Out	6
1.6 Orientation	7
1.7 Getting the Job Done	7
1.8 Problem Solving	8
1.9 Your Progress	10
1.10 Concluding the Internship	10
2. ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES	11
2.1 Pre-Internship Assessment Form	11
2.2 Learning Contract	11
2.2.1 Personal Objective	11
2.2.2 Learning Resources	11
2.2.3 Learning Strategies	11
2.2.4 Timeline	11
2.2.5 Evidence	12
2.2.6 Evaluation Criteria	12
2.3 Internship Contract Form	12
2.4 Internship Waiver Form	12
2.5 Journal	12
2.6 Intern Orientation Form	13
2.7 Organization Background Report	13
2.8 Job Preparation	14
2.8.1 Cover Letter	14
2.8.2 Resume	15
2.8.3 Interview Skills	15
2.9 Intern Analysis Summary Form	15

2.10	Intern Evaluation of Internship Form	15
2.11	Thank You Letter	15

1. Creating a Successful Internship

Understanding what an internship is and is not will help clear up any expectations between the intern and the host company.

1.1 What is an Internship?

An internship is a semi-structured educational work experience, in which the student takes on a responsible role as a worker within an organization. Internships provide the student with an opportunity to learn new skills, expand knowledge of the Information Technology field, explore future career options, and apply classroom instruction in a "real-life" situation.

The internship also enables the host company to tap the resource of students who want a meaningful work experience. In exchange for professional training and supervisory feedback, employers count on interns to bring in a high level of energy and a solid work ethic to their organization.

1.2 What an Internship is Not

- Not a time out - Although an internship is usually pursued outside of the classroom setting, it should not be viewed as "time out" from school to go to work. An internship is a learning experience. Some people learn more effectively through experience, and internships provide that opportunity.
- Not a Go-Fer - An intern is not supposed to perform all the routine or uninteresting work within an organization. An internship should be a meaningful learning experience. Most positions and projects will involve some routine work; however, it is recommended that it be limited.
- Not a Guarantee of a Job Offer - Sometimes interns are offered part-time or full-time employment as a result of contacts made during their internship, but there is no guarantee that an internship will get you a job. Many employers value hiring someone who has had internship experience. Therefore, when you are competing for a particular position in a given field, your internship may prove beneficial. The best way to gain career and job advantages from your internship is to get to know the people you are working with in the organization. Build an information and referral network for yourself.

1.3 Top Ten Tips for Interns

1. Don't be afraid to talk with people. Don't be intimidated because you are a student. People are sometimes too busy to roll out the red carpet, so you have to make the first move to talk with co-workers and supervisors.

2. Ask for things to do. Don't wait to be told what to do. Solving problems and taking initiative are the best ways to stand out from the crowd.
3. Learn all you can about the industry. Talk with people in different departments as well as clients and vendors.
4. Read everything you get your hands on. You won't find everything you need to know in the training manual. Reading contracts, letters, memos, press releases, trade publications help you become informed on all elements of the business.
5. Don't gripe about the grunt work. There is always something more to learn. How long you do grunt work depends on what you make of it. Everything has a purpose, so learn how the small tasks fit into the big picture.
6. Use your student status to your advantage. As a student you aren't threatening and can have more access and opportunities than a full time employee. Everyone wants to help a student learn.
7. Acquaint yourself with successful people. Learn from the people who are the superstar performers and most respected individuals in the office.
8. Get in the information loop. Decisions aren't always made in a conference room.
9. Ask to attend meetings and events. You will learn how things really get done.
10. Don't burn any bridges. You never know when you will see someone later in your career.

1.4 Values Clarification

As an intern, one of the things you'll be exploring is your value system and how it fits into the value system of the host company and the employees of the company. You may see or hear things you don't like very well, or you may be pressured into letting others prejudice your thinking. You will have to deal with a number of attitudes that may appear hardened, cynical, or on the other hand, too soft for your liking.

Clarifying your values will lead to the clarification of your beliefs about the internship experience. As BMCC students, you are expected to maintain a positive belief system. This includes upholding BMCC's drug and alcohol policy and sexual harassment policy. It is recommended that all students refer to their student handbook about BMCC's drug and alcohol policy and sexual harassment policy. It is important to review periodically your values, beliefs and priorities.

Some of the things you should not do include the following:

1. Engage in romantic and/or sexual relations with company staff. Tell anyone making advances toward you that our school has a policy prohibiting becoming involved with anyone during an internship.
2. Go out drinking with company staff, even if they ask you to be the designated driver. While some participation in social occasions is appropriate, other activities are very inappropriate.
3. Take company equipment. Any learning activity utilizing company equipment will be on company property. Taking equipment off company premises will be looked upon as stealing and may result in charges being brought against the intern.
4. Performing at a sub-par level. If this is a result of the student's own choice, then the student will not be reaping the full benefits of the internship experience. To fully enjoy the internship, you not only must complete tasks assigned by your supervisor, but it is also your responsibility to gain industry knowledge through other employees, literature, instructor, etc.
5. Perform an act of violence or sabotage. If someone in the organization is giving you a hard time and appears not to encourage your pursuit of learning, contact your supervisor and the BMCC staff to help reconcile the situation. In no way should you use physical force of sabotage as a means of retaliation. These actions do not help the situation and are grounds for dismissal and possible legal action.

1.5 Starting Out

It is always important to make a good first impression, so plan carefully how you relate to and interact with your supervisor and co-workers.

- **Dress.** Look for clues from your supervisor and other staff members on dress codes. On the first day, dress neatly, simply and appropriately for your job. If you have any questions about dress, consult you supervisor.
- **Promptness.** Oversleeping is a poor excuse for being late on the first day or any day. Time a test ride to work and plan enough time for breakfast, dressing, etc.
- **Attitude.** Your attitude is one of your greatest assets. After your appearance, it is the next factor noticed. A positive attitude will benefit you as well as your co-workers.
- **Organization Rules.** Find out about, follow, and respect the regulations of the organization.
- **Dependability.** Whether you work alone or as part of a team, other responsibilities will come your way if your supervisor can depend on you.

- Respecting the Time of Others. Consider your supervisor's and staff members' time when seeking help on assignments.

1.6 Orientation

Your internship supervisor will have prepared the organization for your arrival and have some sort of orientation program for you. The orientation may include:

- Reading. Prepare to read materials that “informs you” about aspects of your working environment, industry information, organizational policies, or anything that is important to you fitting into the organization, gaining knowledge of the IT industry, completing assigned tasks, etc. You will probably find new information from supervisor.
- Meeting Your Co-Workers. Prepare to be whisked around and introduced to lots of people. Try to keep notes as you go so you can later connect names with faces and roles.
- Planning Your Internship Activities. Although you should be open and respectful of the plan made by your supervisor, it is never too early to ask questions and state preferences.
- Moving In To Your Workplace. You will need to gather supplies and orient yourself to the physical environment of your internship.

If there is no formal orientation, be prepared to give yourself one anyway. Remember that you are now an active learner, responsible for yourself. Just because no one else thinks to orient you does not mean you don't need orientation. In many work environments, staff are overworked and terribly busy. You as an intern, may fall through the cracks if you don't assert yourself. Generally, internship supervisors not only appreciate you asking or reminding them to do things, but they expect it.

1.7 Getting the Job Done

Once you have been on the job and have familiarized yourself with the organization and your assignments, it is probably a good idea to get organized. Here are a few tips to help:

- Schedule Your Time. Obtain a calendar and schedule your time between free time and committed time. The Time Management Workshop would have acquainted you with the necessary knowledge.
- Space Out Your Task. One big task can be broken down into stages.
- Reward Yourself. Plan to give yourself a reward when you finish something important.

- **Pace Your Energy.** Enthusiasm may overwhelm you at the start and leave you with nothing at the end.
- **Set Time Limits.** There are instances that you may feel overwhelmed with assigned work. It is important to set priorities to your assigned tasks and not take too much time on one particular task. In addition, there may be things you don't want to do, but have to. Therefore, make sure to set time aside to do the things you don't necessarily want to do. Put a limit on the time you will spend on that particular task each day until it is finished.
- **Set Aside Time to Plan and Reflect.** A time for planning and thinking is needed in your workday. Set aside time to plan and think about your assignments.
- **Expect the Unexpected.** Give yourself time to finish a project and allow for surprises.

1.8 Problem Solving

Regardless of the nature of your projects or work responsibilities, you are bound to run into problems with people, resources or ideas. Most likely you will have to solve them on your own or with little advice from your supervisor, co-workers or BMCC staff. Certainly no one will solve these problems for you. A responsible approach to problem solving is important now because your work affects other people. You are no longer just responsible for yourself and your coursework.

Expecting problems also helps prepare you for them. Deal with them and don't ignore them. You are capable of making the decision between something you can handle and something to take to your supervisor. Here are a few typical problem situations with potential solutions:

- **“Go-Fer” Work.** Everyone in a work setting may eventually be asked to perform “go-fer” work. The routine jobs play an important role in the effective operation of any organization. As a member of a “team” you will want to chip in when necessary. However, you may not want it to become your permanent job. Consult your supervisor if you feel work activities are not challenging you intellectually.
- **Additional Responsibilities.** At the same time, be sensitive about requesting additional tasks and responsibilities. The success of assigned tasks is evidence of your ability and willingness to complete delegated work. Before asking for extra assignments, be sure that you can handle them. In addition, be sensitive to the idea that there must remain a balance between your needs as a learner and your organization's needs to serve clients and customers.
- **Personal Time.** As an intern, your first priority and commitment must be to your supervisor and the organization. If you have extra work to do that has been assigned by your instructor, you may have to do it on your own time.

- **Pressure.** Meeting deadlines is your responsibility, but if the pressure to finish assignments on time begins to overwhelm you, let your supervisor know. The quality of your work is as important as the time element. The best planning can fall through, so don't be afraid to say you can't finish on time or you think that the project is too much for you to handle.
- **Resentment by Co-Workers.** Some interns discover, much to their surprise, that co-workers resent them because of the special nature and flexibility built into most internships. After all, your co-workers may not have the same privileges as you do, such as meeting with Vice President or even the CEO. It is your supervisor's responsibility to explain your role to fellow employees, but you can help by being sensitive to this issue and sticking to the role of "regular" employee as much as possible.
- **Overtime.** The working world doesn't stop every day at 5:00PM and you may be asked or simply feel pressured to work late or on weekends. This is another tricky issue which you have to resolve yourself. Working extra hours may help you learn more from your internship by experiencing roles and situations not otherwise available. Your commitment to your supervisor, your project, and/or organization may demand that you put in extra work. However, on the other side, you are an independent person just like any other employee and have to make a judgment about when enough is enough. Everyone has a personal life and relationships to maintain. If you find yourself confused about work hours and time, talk to your supervisor and negotiate a solution that takes into account your needs and those of the organization. This is a crucial work skill and you might as well start practicing it right now.
- **Communication.** You are a member of a project team and you begin to feel that your ideas don't count, aren't good enough, or ignored. This may be true and thus require action. On the other hand, you may not be letting people know what you have to offer. Before you get upset, examine your participation and be sure that you have really communicated your thoughts. If you are having trouble doing this, find an "ally" in the office and ask for help.
- **Discrimination.** If you feel you are truly being discriminated against because of age, sex, or race, you will have to check this out with the people involved. Don't over-react. Remember, it is possible that people feel threatened by you just as you feel threatened by them, so consider the situation from all angles before you consult your supervisor. But don't let these problems fester. First talk with the BMCC Student Counselor to help you clarify your thinking and help you decide what steps to take. If you have decided the problem is real, deal with it quickly. You only have limited amount of time on the internship position.
- **Sexual Harassment.** You are being sexually harassed on the job. Talk with the BMCC Student Counselor first before taking action. Use tact in dealing with an "overly friendly" boss or co-worker. You should inform the person immediately and

politely about behavior you find offensive. Optimistically, the situation could resolve itself. Realistically, it will remain a problem unless you take action and resolve it. Ask for help from co-workers if you feel you need it.

1.9 Your Progress

At various stages of your internship, you should quiz yourself on your progress. Compare the changes in your attitude as well as changes in your projects and assignments. Questions to ask:

- Are you meeting deadlines?
- Are you using work time efficiently?
- How are you using your personal skills/knowledge?
- Are you using information you learned from the Cisco training program?
- How well are you performing under supervision? Without supervision?
- Evaluate your approach methods for each assignment?
- Are you enjoying it? Effective working and learning is fun. If your internship is not what you expected, figure out why and do something about it.

1.10 Concluding the Internship

So much effort goes into preparing the internship that we should be reminded that the internship experience is temporary. Therefore, students may need to transition some of their responsibilities upon leaving. Here are some leaving tips:

- If you are required to work with clients, be sure to let them know that you will be leaving and also explain why you are leaving.
- Bring closure to your working relationships. Relationships need maintenance and care regardless if you are to continue at the organization as a hired employee or not.
- It is important to leave your work in such a way that someone can continue from where you left off. Your supervisor will appreciate not having to “clean up your mess” once you are gone.
- Be sure to say thank you. Communicating appreciation to your supervisor and co-workers is very important since they hopefully provided you with attention and care while you were on the internship.

2. Academic Activities

To get the most from an internship, the student will be required to complete assignments as assigned by the BMCC staff. The assignments will help the student understand the purposes of the internship and future work experience.

2.1 Pre-Internship Assessment Form

The student must complete the **Pre-Internship Assessment Form** before the start of the internship. This form asks general questions about the student including a self-assessment, internship expectations, and future thoughts.

2.2 Learning Contract

A learning contract outlines what the student intends to learn and accomplish during their internship. Internship activities will not only include educational and work related goal setting, but also develop personal objectives. Therefore, the learning contract takes on many forms. For instance, it is a way of developing a plan for organizing internship activities. In addition, it is a way to help the student better understand their professional career goals.

The student will prepare a learning contract that is 2 pages in length, double-spaced, typed paper, and hand in before the start of the internship. The learning contract describes a student's learning goals, specific strategies for achieving those goals, and methods for documenting their accomplishment. The learning contract will include the following elements:

2.2.1 Personal Objective

The student's personal goal should be a concise statement of what the student intends to learn during the internship. The student should also be able to describe the skills and experience they hope to acquire.

2.2.2 Learning Resources

The student will discuss the available resources they will use to accomplish their objective. Describe the type of person(s) or thing(s) that will help.

2.2.3 Learning Strategies

List a learning strategy for each personal objective, such as library research, professional meeting, product review, host company's annual report, or interview with vendor, etc.

2.2.4 Timeline

The student should be aware of the limited amount of time at the host company to accomplish their personal objective.

2.2.5 Evidence

The student must present evidence that their personal objectives were (or weren't) reached. Evidence will include summaries of conversations, literature, memos, and personal accounts. Please see section on keeping a Journal.

2.2.6 Evaluation Criteria

Describe how your internship experience should be evaluated to determine if you have accomplished your goal. This should refer to both your Personal Goal and the Evidence.

2.3 *Internship Contract Form*

The student, Internship Coordinator, and the host company must sign the **Internship Contract Form** before the start of the internship.

2.4 *Internship Waiver Form*

The student must sign the **Internship Waiver Form** before the start of the internship.

2.5 *Journal*

The student is required to maintain a journal of the activities engaged in on the job, with comments on specific problems and challenges the student has experienced and how he/she confronted, analyzed and solved (or was not able to solve) the problems. In addition, the journal may include:

- daily account of activities
- learning accomplished
- personal insights
- questions generated
- problems solved
- how much time spent on activities
- organizational systems learned

The journal is to help the student reflect on their internship and broaden their learning experiences. Students are encouraged to share journal entries to the rest of the class for everyone's mutual benefit.

Listed below are things the student might want to address when they think about personal insights:

- How does this experience compare with other work experiences you've had?
- What are your co-workers like? What is your supervisor like?
- How do you feel about the knowledge and experience you are gaining while performing the internship?
- How does the knowledge you've learned in the classroom compare to what you are experiencing in the field?

- Are there certain parts about your internship that excite/bore you?
- Are there certain parts about your internship that anger/please you?

2.6 Intern Orientation Form

The student must submit the **Intern Orientation Form** at the end of the first 2 weeks of the internship to BMCC staff.

2.7 Organization Background Report

Within the organization that you will be working in there are many interrelationships between people, events and issues. Understanding these relationships may help in better understanding the work environment and on becoming a team player. In addition, the outcome of the relationships may be a lesson in organizational development, politics and the humanities.

The Organization Background Report will aid the student in understanding the organization's goals, the organizational environment, and how the student fits into the organization. The student will turn in a 2-3 page, double-spaced, typed paper which demonstrates your understanding of the organization for which you are working and your role in that situation. The report must be handed in no later than at the end of the fourth week of internship. Below are suggestions of what you may want to put into your report:

- Organizational Information:
 - History - a brief history of the organization (in the case of a large organization, only give the history of the organizational unit at which you are working)
 - Mission Statement / Organizational Philosophy / Operating Objectives
 - Major Policies - any personnel policies or other pertinent policies that might affect you
 - Is there a consensus or disagreement on them?
 - Do they reflect actual practice?
 - Clientele / Customers / Audience Served
 - Are they visible? What do they act like?
 - Leadership - specify and list their responsibilities (this might include an organizational chart)
 - Who are the leaders in your organization? Who makes things happen?
 - People
 - What are the backgrounds, education, or other qualifications of the leaders, co-workers and your supervisor?

- Are people happy or not? Why?
- Your Supervisor
 - What motivates him/her? What is he/she aiming for?
 - What sort of supervisory style does he/she use with you? Other workers?
- Activities and Programs
- Your Position:
 - Organizational Setting – physical appearance, structure, personnel, clients/customers.
 - What does your office space look like? Where is it located?
 - How do you feel when you are there?
 - What does your section of the organization do?
 - How does your section fit into the total organization?
 - What kind of financial resources does your section have?
 - What are the backgrounds and job responsibilities of your supervisor and co-workers?
 - Are there any recent changes to the organization that your section is responding to?
 - Who are the clients that you will be working with? What do they act like?
 - Your Job
 - How do your responsibilities fit into the activities of your section?
 - How do your job responsibilities fit/match your own personal objectives?
 - How do you feel about it?
- Conclusion

2.8 Job Preparation

Workshops on cover letter and resume writing and interview skills will be scheduled to help the student prepare to enter the workforce.

2.8.1 Cover Letter

The purpose of a cover letter is to briefly express the student's interest in a particular job and summarize the key points of the student's resume, such as abilities, skills, and aptitude for the job. This letter gives the student the chance to highlight and personalize the student's achievements. In addition, the cover letter provides an opportunity to discuss why the student chose the particular organization they are applying. It is very important to tell the organization why it would be a good experience for them to have the student as an employee. The letter should articulate what the student will contribute to the company.

2.8.2 Resume

The resume will feature the student's academic, professional and personal achievements. There are many styles and formats to choose from when creating a resume. Talking with people who have written resumes is a great way to get ideas. Some resume formats suggest to use an objective or professional goal. It is usually a one sentence goal statement and it must be tailored to the exact job the student is applying. Sometimes a summary statement is beneficial. This is a brief paragraph that highlights the student's most important accomplishments. It should be geared towards the particular job the student is applying for.

2.8.3 Interview Skills

Once the student schedules a job interview with a prospective employer, it is important to be prepared. The student should anticipate questions and practice answering those questions. In addition, students should be prepared to have questions of their own. These questions should be geared towards finding out more information about the particular job and company.

2.9 Intern Analysis Summary Form

The student must submit the **Intern Analysis Summary Form** at the end of the internship. This form explores the student's internship experience by comparing the work responsibilities described in the **Intern Orientation Form** and what actually occurred at the host company.

2.10 Intern Evaluation of Internship Form

The student must submit the **Intern Evaluation of Internship Form** at the end of the internship. This form allows the student to evaluate BMCC and the host company on the overall quality of the internship experience.

2.11 Thank You Letter

As a gesture of appreciation, the student will submit a formal thank you letter to their internship supervisor. The student is responsible for making sure that a copy of that letter is given to the Internship Coordinator or the Student Counselor Coordinator.