

WASHINGTON INTERNSHIP HANDBOOK



The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey

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General Description

The Washington Internship program is an intensive para-professional and academic experience in which Stockton students live, work, and study in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan region. Stockton College is affiliated with the nation's largest internship organization, The Washington Center (TWC). This organization provides all the major facets of a student's internship experience, i.e., facilitating the application process; distributing the application to potential placement sites; providing program activities, advising, supervision, and evaluation; hiring faculty for the evening classes; and providing housing and residence life activities.

- ***Internships are available for all majors at Stockton College.***
Interns receive 12 academic credits that are applied to graduation requirements (e.g. Program, Cognate, ASD). Internships are available during the Fall and Spring semesters (15 weeks) and during the summer (10 weeks). Stockton students who are unable to do an internship during their undergraduate years can apply for a Post-Graduate internship (available Fall, Spring and Summer).
- ***Internship expenses are comparable to the costs of a semester at Stockton.***
Generally, the cost of a Washington internship is comparable to the expenses (i.e., tuition, fees, room & board, books) for a full semester at Stockton College because Stockton College is the only institution in the country that receives an automatic \$2,550 discount from The Washington Center. Stockton bills interns directly for the prevailing flat-rate tuition fee (for 12 credits), plus a General Educational fee and housing. After Stockton collects these fees from the interns, the College then pays The Washington Center; students are not billed directly by TWC. Whatever financial assistance Stockton students receive during the regular academic semesters is applied directly to the costs of a Washington internship. The Washington Center provides scholarships and a few fully paid internships (on a competitive basis). Moreover, all Stockton interns also receive an \$800 stipend that can be used to defray the costs of commuting, meals, tuition, or personal amenities. This stipend is typically received at the midpoint of an intern's semester in D.C. – the money comes from Stockton, but the checks are issued individually to each intern by TWC (you will be notified by TWC when the checks are available for pickup at its headquarters.)
- ***Internships significantly enhance marketability for professional jobs and graduate schools.***
In addition to academic credit, internships represent an invaluable opportunity to significantly enhance a student's resume by developing professional skills, on-the-job training, and analytical tools for jobs and graduate school. Interns also acquire a broad network of contacts that can be critical in job searches, job referrals, and letters of recommendations for professional positions or graduate school.

- ***Internships offer innumerable opportunities for personal development.***
A semester can profoundly and positively affect an individual's growth and maturity. Many students become increasingly self-confident by successfully negotiating the demands of working at a full-time (36 hours weekly) internship; commuting to their internship job and program activities; meeting the academic requirements of their internship class; developing new friendships, enjoying the rich social and cultural life of the nation's capital; and maintaining an apartment with three (fellow-intern) roommates.

History of Stockton's Internship Program

Since the mid-1970s more than 1,000 Stockton students have completed para-professional internships in Washington, D.C. One of the largest groups of Washington Center alumni in the country is from Stockton College. It is very common to find Stockton alumni in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan region who trace the trajectory of their career paths to their internships as Stockton undergraduates.

Types of Internships

It is important to bear in mind that there are hundreds of individual internship placements within the following list of internship categories.

- US Congressional Offices, the White House, and Political Campaigns
- Executive Branch Departments and Federal Agencies
- Nonprofit, Social Service and Advocacy Organizations
- Federal and Local Criminal Justice Agencies and Law Firms
- Broadcast and Print Media
- Public Relations and Lobbying Firms
- Museum and Cultural Institutions
- Investment, Accounting, Marketing, and Advertising Firms
- Foreign Policy and International Aid Organizations
- Research Organizations in the Natural, Biological and Medical Sciences

As the largest internship organization in the country, The Washington Center utilizes its vast network of contacts to facilitate the placement of students. Internships are also possible with organizations, firms, agencies, etc. that are not currently part of The Washington Center's network of placement sites, i.e., for students who have a particular placement site in mind who has not previously had an internship relationship with The Washington Center.

Who is Eligible for an Internship?

Many students believe incorrectly that it is quite difficult to be accepted into The Washington Center's internship program. In fact, the admission requirements are fairly minimal: a 2.75 GPA. Essentially, once the Campus Liaison signs a student's application,

the student is virtually assured of acceptance. If a student's GPA is slightly below 2.75, a third letter of recommendation is required and the application is given an additional level of review by The Washington Center. All but one of the very few Stockton students who have applied with a GPA below 2.75 have been accepted and have received excellent internship placements.

- **Please Note:** Internships are open to both U.S. and international students. However, some (Washington Center) scholarship opportunities with federal agencies are available only to U.S. citizens. Also, all prospective interns cannot start a Washington internship until they are at least a second-semester sophomore.

It is crucial to bear in mind that the main question for prospective Stockton students is not whether they will be accepted into the Washington internship – that is virtually assured with a 2.75 GPA and the Campus Liaison's signature on the application. Nor is it a question of whether students will receive internship placements: Once their applications are accepted, internships are *guaranteed*. Instead, the only real question is “*where*” students will be placed.

Preliminary Considerations before Applying for an Internship

- ***What is the best semester for an internship?*** Students should weigh carefully which semester is the most appropriate time for an internship. Students who hope to turn their internship experience into a possible full-time job offer – which does occur at times – should consider an internship during their last semester at Stockton. That will enable interns who are offered jobs to transition easily into their full-time positions. Other students are motivated almost entirely by internship experience, the enhancement of their resumes, and the development of para-professional skills, without necessarily hoping to leverage their internship into a permanent job in Washington. For these students, any semester – after the sophomore year – would be a good time to be in Washington.
- Some students are in majors with fairly structured curricular requirements. If students cannot be away from Stockton during the Fall/Spring semesters, then a (10-week) summer internship may be the best option. Also, for students who cannot do an internship during their undergraduate years, a post-graduate internship is available for students who have recently graduated. While the post-graduate internships are substantially less expensive than an undergraduate internship, financial assistance is typically not available because the interns are no longer students. Another consideration is that there is significantly less competition for the more coveted internship positions during the Fall/Spring semesters. During the regular academic year, there are many more internship opportunities than students to fill them. The competition for internships is especially intense during the summer. However, all Stockton students who are accepted into The Washington Center are guaranteed an internship placement; this is also true during the summer when the competition is much greater.

- ***Talk to parents.*** It is absolutely essential that students discuss with their parents what a Washington internship entails. This should be done well before a student begins the application process, especially if parents are contributing financially to a student's undergraduate education.
- ***Review program/graduation requirements with a preceptor.*** Students receive 12 academic credits for a Washington internship. Of these, 8 credits are for the internship itself and 4 credits are for the course all students take during their Washington internship. An additional option is for students to take a GIS independent study in addition to their TWC seminar and receive 16 total credits. Before an application is submitted, students should consult with their preceptor to decide – before the internship begins – where the 12 (or optional 16) credits should be allocated, i.e., either to program, cognate, or ASD requirements. However, because the internship experience is quite intensive, students should only consider taking the GIS independent study if they absolutely need 16 credits during their internship semester in order to graduate on time. Interested students should discuss this option with their preceptors and the Campus Liaison.
- ***Review Financial Assistance Status.*** There are several considerations that students should bear in mind as they make arrangements to pay for their internship.
 - **First**, the costs of the Washington internship program are paid directly to Stockton College, just like any other semester. Again, the fees are for flat-rate tuition, a General Educational student fee, and a housing fee.
 - **Second**, whatever financial assistance (e.g. scholarships, grants, loans) students usually receive during the Fall/Spring is applied to their balance for the semester they are in Washington, D.C. Students interested in summer internships should determine whether their scholarships/grants/loans extend into the summer.
 - **Third**, generally, an internship semester in Washington, D.C., costs about the same as a full-time semester at Stockton (i.e., the tuition and student fees for four courses, room and board, books, and personal expenses).
 - **Fourth**, Stockton College gives each of its interns an \$800 stipend to help defray the costs of a Washington internship. The stipend is generally received at the mid-point of a student's internship in D.C. These funds can be used to pay down a student's outstanding balance to The Washington Center. Or, the money can be used for commuting expenses, meals, and personal items.

- **Fifth**, The Washington Center also offers on a competitive basis scholarships of various amounts. In order to be considered for scholarships, students need to submit their applications before the “Competitive Deadline” for each individual semester. There are also a few fully-funded internship opportunities. These are few in number and they are exceedingly competitive. However, every semester at least one, or more, Stockton interns receive some form of financial assistance from The Washington Center. There is not a separate application for scholarships. Students merely have to mark the scholarship categories on the first page of the application form in order to be considered.

The Application Process

Stockton students applying for an internship should visit The Washington Center’s Web site (<http://www.twc.edu>) and click on “Prospective Students.” One of the first steps is to create an account on TWC Web site. The application process is online although hard copies of the transcript and letters of recommendation can be submitted.

Students should familiarize themselves with the general details of the program; speak with their preceptor to discuss how the 12 (or 16) credits may be allocated among program, cognate, or ASD graduation requirements; carefully review whether they are financially prepared to assume the costs of an internship in Washington, and meet with the Campus Liaison (Asst. Professor Michael S. Rodriguez) before the application process is initiated.

The application packet includes the following items:

The application form. Students apply online through The Washington Center’s Web site (<http://www.twc.edu>). On the homepage click on “Prospective Students,” and proceed to set up an account before filling out any application forms.

- ***A current resume.*** Students should have the Career Services staff review their resumes before submitting them to The Washington Center. For assistance on developing a professional resume, students should call Career Services to set up an appointment for a one-on-one session. The office number is 609-652-4650.
- ***An official Stockton transcript.*** The Campus Liaison will obtain an official transcript from Student Records. Students must have at least a 2.75 GPA at the time the application is submitted to be accepted into the Washington Internship Program. If a student’s GPA is slightly below the minimum, an additional letter of recommendation is required (for a total of three). The critical difference is that as long as students meet the minimum GPA they are virtually assured of being accepted into the internship program. For students with GPAs below the minimum 2.75, the third letter is usually enough to ensure admission; however, there is the possibility that The Washington Center will reject their applications.

- **Two essays.** These are probably the most important and time-consuming items of the application packet. Prospective students are required to write two essays.
 - The first one (500 words) covers an issue of interest to the applicant. The essay is an opinion or reflection piece that demonstrates a student’s ability to think clearly, write cogently, and formulate a reasonably coherent argument. The essay should be a topic with which the student is generally familiar and it should relate to a student’s area of interest for an internship in D.C. For example, a biology major who is interested in a research-based internship may write about the ongoing debate, and controversy, on public funding of stem cell research. The 500-word essay is not a research paper, though a cursory review of a few news articles may be helpful in developing a more informed essay.
 - The second essay (100 words) is a very short description of the type of internship work a student envisions, and how it relates to the student’s broader educational and professional aspirations. It is very important for students *not* to mention that they want an internship at a specific place. A number of prospective employers will read a student’s application. It is important for students to not give the impression that they are interested in only one potential internship placement.
 - Both essays are reviewed by the Campus Liaison and returned for revision, if necessary. These essays must not be posted online until the Campus Liaison approves them.
- **Two letters of recommendation.** Students need to identify two individuals to write strong letters of recommendation. At least one recommender must be a current or former professor. The second letter can also be from a professor, but many students ask individuals who have supervised them in an employment setting. Students cannot ask fellow students for a letter of recommendation. The application has a form that students must download and give to their recommenders. In addition to filling out that form, recommenders must also write a separate letter on their institution’s letterhead.

There is a non-refundable \$60 application fee. Submitting an application to The Washington Center does not mean that a student is “locked” into going to Washington. If circumstances arise that preclude a student from accepting an internship offer, the application can be withdrawn. If a student applies and subsequently withdraws his/her application, the \$60 fee will not be reimbursed.

The Placement Process

Once a student’s application is received by The Washington Center, the following steps occur:

- 1) An email is immediately sent to the student acknowledging receipt of the application.
- 2) Typically, within a couple of weeks from that point, the applicant receives the acceptance letter (through email and a hard copy).
- 3) A few weeks later The Washington Center assigns a Placement Advisor to each student. The PA contacts the student to discuss the range of internship opportunities that may suit the students' interests.
- 4) The Washington Center identifies a variety of potential placement sites and sends a copy of a student's application packet to each site.
- 5) Student can monitor the progress of their applications through The Washington Center's website. Web links for all the placement sites that receive a student's application are posted on this Web site.
- 6) At this point students need to be patient. Several weeks may lapse from the time a student's application is distributed to potential placement sites and when the first interviews occur.
- 7) The Washington Center does not determine where a student will be placed for an internship. That decision is in the hands of the placement sites that receive a student's application.
- 8) Usually, a student is contacted by phone to arrange a time for a phone interview. Before the interview, students should research the potential placement site through the link provided on The Washington Center's Web page.
- 9) The phone interview is generally informal, but it presents an important opportunity for prospective interns to ask how the placement site utilizes interns, what opportunities exist for enhancing job skills, the type of mentoring an intern can expect, the dress code for that particular placement site, etc. Students are advised to speak with former interns to get a sense of how the phone interview is conducted. There is not a standard format for these interviews.
- 10) Students should not expect to be interviewed by every placement site that receives their application. It is possible that a student may receive only one or two interviews. Conversely, a student could be interviewed by several placement sites. The factors that influence this are typically the strength of a student's application (the essays, the quality of writing, the GPA, and the strength of the letters of recommendation). It is important to realize that placement sites receive many internship applications, and they may be looking for only one intern. However, The Washington Center has a strong reputation

and prospective placement sites know that internship applications that come through The Washington Center are consistently from strong candidates.

- 11) After a student is interviewed, an internship offer may be made within a few days. If a student receives an offer from one placement site but is waiting to hear from another site, it is not uncommon to ask for a few additional days to decide whether to accept the first internship offer.
- 12) Before any internship offer is accepted, students should speak with their Program Advisor at The Washington Center and/or the Campus Liaison at Stockton. Students can accept one internship offer.

What Happens before an Internship?

In addition to interviewing for and securing an internship placement, there are a number of steps students need to take before their internship begins.

- ***Housing during the internship.*** Housing is provided by The Washington Center in a relatively new apartment complex known as the RAF (Residential and Academic Facility). Interns are generally pleasantly surprised by the superior quality of the housing as it is not what one generally associates with student housing. The Washington Center provides residence life staff members who provide assistance with housing issues and occasional social activities. The furnished apartments are single-sex, with two bedrooms (two interns per room), two bathrooms, a kitchen, and a spacious living room. The RAF has a variety of amenities like a fitness rooms, laundry services, classrooms, and a computer center. Before an internship begins, students fill out and submit a housing form to The Washington Center. The form is an opportunity for students to identify any accommodations they may need, a preference for certain types of students (e.g. vegetarians), and a preference for a particular roommate (if they have one in mind). The form can also be used to pay a \$300 housing deposit that The Washington Center requires from all prospective interns. *****Important***** It is strongly suggested that students use a credit card number for the deposit. The Washington Center will not charge the credit card unless a fine is imposed at the end of an internship. Fines are typically imposed for not cleaning an apartment when interns move out, or damaging the furniture. If students pay the housing deposit with a check, The Washington Center will deposit it and the money will be drawn from a student's bank account. If no fines are imposed at the end of the internship, all the money will be returned, but it might take several weeks from the end of the internship to actually receive the funds. For that reason, it is better to use a credit card for the housing deposit.
- ***Selecting the internship course.*** Several weeks before an internship begins, The Washington Center will ask prospective interns to identify their top five choices for the class they will take during their internship. The form and a list of classes (along with course descriptions) can be accessed through TWC Web site. The

Washington Center typically offers between 30-35 courses each semester. The Washington Center hires the faculty, who are professors and practitioners from the Washington, D.C., metropolitan region. The Washington Center estimates that students spend \$50-\$100 on books. The classes meet once a week, in the evening for 3 hours (usually 6:30-9:30pm). To be frank, the quality of the classes can be uneven. Some courses are exceedingly rigorous, while others clearly are not. Stockton students receive 4 credits for the course they take during the internship. Also, students can enroll in a 4-credit GIS independent study with the Campus Liaison. Arrangements for this option should be completed before students move to Washington to start their internships.

- **Registering for internship credits.** Before students begin their Washington internship they are registered for the following credits: Washington Internship (WASH 3940 – 8 credits) and Washington Seminar (WASH 3620 – 4 credits) and the optional GIS independent study. Students cannot register for these credits on their own. The Campus Liaison gives Student Records a list of all the prospective students. The registration is done by the Student Records staff. All 12 (or 16) credits are treated as Stockton credits, i.e. the credits are used to fulfill graduation requirements and the all the grades are reflected in a student's Stockton GPA.
- **Notifying Stockton offices.** The Campus Liaison emails a list of interns to a number of Stockton College offices and departments to notify them of the students who will be away for a semester. Some of the offices are Student Records, Financial Aid, Academic Affairs, and the Bursar's Office.
- **Paying the Internship bill.** The \$2,550 discount that Stockton students receive is already reflected in a intern's bill from Stockton College. Students on financial aid should speak with financial aid and the Bursar's Office to ensure that their financial aid is properly reflected in their Stockton bill for their internship semester.

What Happens During an Internship?

A Washington internship is a very intense experience. Essentially, students do the following activities in the course of a typical week

- **36-hour work week.** A Washington internship should be viewed as a full-time work experience. Interns work alongside regular professional staffs at their placement sites. Internships are designed to provide real, hands-on experience and development of para-professional skills. The Washington Center requires that at least 80% of an intern's work assignments be substantive. If interns find that they are spending more than 20% of their time answering phones, photocopying, or performing other menial tasks, they should speak with their Program Advisor at The Washington Center, as well as Stockton's Campus Liaison.

- ***Monday afternoon activities.*** Every Monday afternoon all The Washington Center interns are released from their placement sites at noon, in order to attend activities that are sponsored by The Washington Center. These include lectures by prominent public officials, panel discussions, focused presentations (e.g. developing a professional resume), or embassy visits. Throughout the internship semester, students will be required to write short papers on some of these activities. The papers are included in an intern's portfolio.
- ***Internship class.*** The internship class meets once a week for three hours (from 6:30-9:30 pm). Classes are typically held on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. As with any class, attendance is mandatory, and interns are required to do the reading and writing assignments on a timely basis.
- ***The internship portfolio.*** Every week interns work on some aspect of their portfolio with supervision from their Program Advisors. This is a bound compilation of an intern's written work throughout the semester. This includes an IDP (Individual Development Plan), a Defense Letter (a self evaluation at the end of the semester), reaction papers on some of the Monday afternoon activities, a work sample, a report on an informational interview, a resume, the course syllabus, course papers, etc. The portfolio is a very important component of the internship experience. After the internship it can be shown to prospective employers or graduate schools as a demonstration of a student's career potential, para-professional experiences, and analytical ability. Interns work closely with the Program Advisors throughout the semester to develop their portfolios.
- ***Social activities.*** During any given semester, as many as 500 interns from throughout the United States and several other countries are part of The Washington Center's program. The opportunities to make enduring friendships are innumerable, as are the opportunities to enjoy the vibrant social and cultural life in the nation's capital.

Interns Beware

Stockton students need to be aware that Washington, D.C., is a very expensive city. One of the biggest concerns for Stockton interns is that they invariably spend more money than they anticipated, particularly on meals and social activities. It is very common for interns to be invited to restaurants during the workday and to clubs and other social venues at night. An active social life can be exceedingly expensive. Students need to exercise caution and discipline in how they budget and spend their money. For the most part, interns do not have paid internships, and it is very difficult to hold down a part-time job while doing an internship in Washington. Interns are generally advised to budget approximately \$150 a week for commuting expenses, meals, social activities, and personal expenses.

Before the internship semester begins all students attend a one- or two-day orientation. A great deal of attention is paid to the do's and don'ts of living and working in the

Washington, D.C., area. Suffice it to say, Washington, D.C., is a highly complex, and cosmopolitan urban center, as well as the nation's seat of power. For students who are unaccustomed to living in an urban environment, they should know that it is always safer to explore Washington, D.C., in the company of fellow interns.

General Remarks:

It is certainly a bit cliché but true nonetheless: *An internship is what one makes of it.* A Washington internship has the potential to be a uniquely transformative period in a student's life. There are a great many examples of Stockton alums whose personal and professional development were immensely enhanced by their Washington internship. It is up to each individual student to make the most of the experience. This means that students should be especially diligent in performing their internship responsibilities. They should volunteer for additional work assignments and seek out the mentorship and advice of Washingtonians who have achieved professional success. Washington, D.C., is a city of very prominent and powerful people. It is incumbent upon Stockton students to "rub elbows" with these folks, to learn as much as is possible from them, and to emulate their strategies and philosophies for achieving success in one's career.