



Turfgrass Internship Manual

HORT 391

New Mexico State University

By: Joe Villela and Justin Painter



The how-to guide for the perfect internship!

This manual contains all the necessary information on getting and keeping a turfgrass related internship through New Mexico State University. Internships are a very important part of getting your turfgrass science degree. They provide necessary practical experience for turf students and give you a feel for what you can expect after you have completed your degree. In today's increasingly competitive job market internships are a must! They show future employers that you're dedicated to the turfgrass field of study and want to pursue it as a lifelong career. For those with prior turfgrass experience, an internship will give you experience in somewhat of a management role. Internships are not all fun and games though; the title intern comes with more responsibility than your average seasonal worker. You will be expected to go above and beyond the normal role of a turfgrass industry employee.

Within this manual you will find everything that you could need in regards to internships. It is brought to you by two former NMSU turf students with five summers of internship experience between them. Do not think of internships as something you have to do to complete your degree (although you do), they will better you as an employee and future manager of a turfgrass facility. The best advice we can give in all portions of your internship is work hard and have fun!

Why participate in a Turfgrass Internship Program?

One major reason to participate in an internship is to determine a career path. Many students in college still are not sure exactly what they want to do for a full time career. There are several different career paths a Turfgrass student can take, from professional athletic fields and golf course management, to fertilizer sales or turfgrass research. Completing an internship in your desired field will give you hands-on experience to decide if this is the best path for you.

While a college degree in your field will help you in obtaining a position, the hands-on experience obtained from an internship is necessary to succeed in the business. This will expose you to the daily routines and schedules that you will be looking forward to after graduation. You will also gain extremely valuable knowledge about all aspects of the field including real-world situations and management issues, which will be important when you graduate and become a leader.

Graduation can be a scary time for people that do not have the experience or contacts to land a job after school is over. Internships are great for your resume, and many companies will hire hard-working interns after they graduate. Employers are looking for real-world experience as well as formal education, and this is one of the best ways to get the experience. Internships are also a great networking tool, and will give you references and contacts within the industry.

Table of Contents

- **Pre-application (pg. 3-5)**
 - Am I ready for an internship?
 - Types of common turfgrass internships
 - Where do I find potential internship postings

- **The application process/ resume and cover letter skills (pg. 6-7)**
 - Resume building and cover letter tricks and hints
 - Sending in your resume/cover letter
 - Getting a call-back and interview skills

- **Preparing for an internship (pg. 7)**
 - What you should know
 - Things to bring

- **The day to day life of an intern (pg. 8-22)**
 - Being successful at the work place
 - Weekly completion records
 - Important questions to ask and learn
 - Making the internship yours

- **Post internship (pg. 23)**
 - Reporting back and presentations
 - Recommendation to future interns

Pre-Application

Am I ready for a turfgrass internship?

Internships are intended for turfgrass students to gain practical experience in a work-place setting. This is an introduction to a management career, and should not be taken lightly. You will be performing physical labor and working long hours, rain or shine. Interns will be expected to perform at 100% every day, and will have higher expectations than many of the seasonal workers on the crew. Showing up late to work, slacking on the job, or performing at less than par will get you fired or may affect your reference in the future. However, if you are willing to work hard and pay attention, this may be one of the best experiences of your life and can seriously jumpstart your career!

When should you participate in an Internship Program?

It is best to do internships in the summer break since you will have the time to dedicate to the job. Summers are a great time as most turf facilities are in the active growing season and summers are usually the busiest time of the season. Most turfgrass internships are three months long with some being six to nine months long. If you ask, some local turf facilities are willing to offer internships that are available during the semester.

Many universities view the summer after your junior year of college as the ideal time to complete an internship; but we say do it as often as possible! The more experience you have, the more marketable you will be after graduation. It is best to start looking for summer internships in late October to early November. Most managers like to hire interns in December to January. If you have slacked off a little, not to worry there are always last minute internship opportunities throughout the spring leading up to summer, although you might not get your ideal internship if you wait too long.

It is possible to do 3 summer internships in a 4-year turfgrass program, so if you decide you did not enjoy your first internship experience, you can switch directions before it is too late. For this reason, starting your internship experiences the first summer after your freshman year is recommended. Post-graduation internships are also available for those who may not be able to find a permanent job after graduation, some even offer longer internships from 6 months to a year. This should give plenty of time to search for jobs while also obtaining valuable experience.

What should interns expect of their experience?

Interns should expect to receive one-on-one mentoring from experienced superintendents and other workers in the field. The work experience should be a strong reinforcement of classroom materials. A wide variety of jobs and responsibilities will be given to interns so they can learn all about the business. This however, is a two way street, and in return an intern should be ready to be a very dedicated worker and a part of the crew. Most interns will be looking for a leadership position after graduation and this should be reflected in your work ethic throughout the entire internship. Superintendents/managers will award hard working students with challenging and rewarding work assignments.

How to Find Turfgrass Internships

Types of Turfgrass Internships

- Golf course maintenance internships
- Athletic field internships
- Research type internships

Internships are most commonly found online. But internships are often found by word of mouth, or by applying to a local golf course.

There are a few very helpful websites with job boards:

Golf courses-----Turfnet.com, Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA.org)

Athletic fields----- Sports Turf Management Association (www.stma.org)

When you start looking through the job boards on these websites, odds are you will find many different types of internships throughout the country and sometimes internationally. The best advice we can give when picking out internships you might want to apply for is to pick the ones where you would like to have a permanent job one day. Location is also an important factor; select an internship in a similar region or environment to where you would like to work someday. For example, east coast internships are going to be much different than an internship in the southwest or the mountain west. Once you have picked out a couple internships postings, it's time to apply!

The east coast is full of turfgrass programs, so expect that there will be many other students applying for the same internship that you will be. We recommend applying to several internship programs in the hopes that you might get at least one or more offer. This way you will be able to compare the different programs and choose the best one for you. Make sure to be prepared during the interview and **WRITE THINGS DOWN!** You will likely get the offer several weeks later, so it is important to remember how the interview went, and what your gut feelings were about the manager and the position. This will help you decide which program is best fit for you, and may affect your final decision in the future.

The Application Process

It is important (and often required) these days to have both a formal resume and cover letter, which will highlight your work experience as well as background information about yourself. Superintendents and managers may have stacks of resumes to go through when looking for an intern, and this will be your key to landing the position.

Resume Building

A good resume will not get you the job all by itself, but a bad one will certainly send you to the rejection pile. A resume might be the most important thing you write so do not take this step lightly! Ask your parents/teachers/advisors to review your resume and ask them for suggestions to improve it before you send it out to a potential employer.

The standard intern resume can be divided into seven sections: contact information, objective, education, work and/or volunteer experience, awards and honors, interests and activities, and references. Your resume should be formatted in an easy-to-read style that is not confusing or unorganized. The top of your resume should include your name and contact info, with an e-mail address, phone number, and a home address as well. Following this should be an objective sentence, which should be a simple statement describing what you are looking for in an internship program.

The next two sections should be formatted in chronological order, from most recent to oldest. Recent education should be listed, including current schools, and any school you have attended in the past 5 years, or is relevant to the position being obtained. Be sure to list the degrees you have received at these schools. Work/volunteer experience should be listed next, and should include the name of the employer, job title, hire and end date, contact information for your immediate supervisor, and a brief description of your duties and responsibilities.

The next few sections may or may not be needed, but it is a good idea to list any awards or honors you have received, as well as a list of references and their contact information. Your personal interests and activities may also be listed here, but may be better to list in your cover letter.

Cover Letter

The cover letter should serve to personalize your resume and relate it to the specific individual that will be receiving your resume. Your cover letter will be submitted and looked at together, so they should be similar in format and font. Each cover letter should be personalized for who will be receiving it, by addressing it to their full name, and including relevant information about that specific position/program.

You may choose to create a 'general' cover letter that will include the basic information, but be sure to personalize it: change the name and add a few sentences that show that this letter was specifically written for that program. For example, talk about how you like the "shape of their bunkers, and the design of the course" if looking for a golf course internship.

Contacting the Employer

More often than not, you will be applying for a position online, through e-mail. It is important to be professional in every way when contacting a possible employer. Make sure you are not using an 'old' e-mail address that is unprofessional, ex: gamer69@yahoo.com. If you must, use your school e-mail address or create a new e-mail address as you will be using this now and for the future in your career.

Be professional when addressing the manager, by using Mr. and their last name; it is not recommended to address a manager by first name until you have already communicated with him. It is important to double check your e-mail once or twice before you send it. When attaching your resume and cover letter to the e-mail, make sure you click on them before you send it to make sure that they open correctly and the format has not changed. Also, if you have created a 'general' cover letter, be sure you are sending the right personalized letter to the correct person.

Preparing for an Internship

You need to know as much background information about the turf facility as possible before you get there. This will help you get a fast start and not have to learn all the basics like what time work starts, where the maintenance building is or, what kind of equipment you'll have to work with. Also, it's good to know all of the names of your bosses before you arrive to make a good first impression. Some of these internships might be far from your current home so be prepared and bring all the necessities of life. You want to minimize worrying about the little things and maximize time spent learning and gaining knowledge.

Some basic questions we found helpful before heading to an internship:

- Housing questions
 - What furniture and or household items are provided?
 - Will I be sharing a room?
 - How close to the facility is the housing?
 - Any questions specific to your internship scenario
- General Questions
 - What is the dress code at work?
 - When does work start?
 - Do I need to bring any of my own PPE? (gloves, earplugs, etc.)

The Day to Day Life of an Intern

Being Successful in the Workplace

Being successful in the workplace should be your ultimate goal in your internship as well as your future career. To achieve this goal, you must make short and long term goals for yourself and strive to achieve these goals. When you first enter an internship, you should find out exactly what is expected of you. This could be anything from the first task you complete on the job to a month long project that you lead. This brings us to our next point; first impressions are very important! It is crucial that when you get to your internship you introduce yourself to everyone in a very positive way. Do not expect immediate respect from the employees just because you're the intern. Respect is earned, not given and the best way to earn this respect is to work hard. Make it very clear what your strengths and weaknesses are to your superiors. Even if you are given a task that seems somewhat elementary to you, do it as well and efficiently as you can.

In terms of the long and short term goals, this manual should keep you on track. We will provide the weekly completion sheet that you will answer at the end of every week. You can find a blank weekly completion sheet on the next page (be sure to have or print out as many weekly sheets as are required of you). We will also provide an example of what a completed weekly record sheet looks like. One of the questions on the sheet will be a short-term goal that you set for yourself the previous week. Be sure to try to make this goal happen. Work with your supervisors to the best of your ability to help you achieve your short term goals.

Some basic things that will help you be successful no matter where your internship is:

- Get to work early and stay late unless otherwise instructed.
- Ask as many relevant questions as you can while still getting your work done.
- Go above and beyond what is expected of you.
- Strive to work harder than anyone else (including other interns) if working on a task with other employees.
- When you are given responsibility, take advantage of it and make sure it reflects the person you are.
- Be reliable! If your bosses feel like you have a firm grasp on what you're doing and leave you to it, make sure they don't regret it.
- Leave on good terms; make your bosses miss having you there. This could lead to future employment.

Making the Internship Yours

With some internships you will find that they have a very laid out, structured plan. This could be a great thing if you have little experience in the turfgrass industry. If you do have more experience this could be somewhat of a burden, having to complete and re-learn tasks that you already know about. To get the most out of an experience in the turf industry, you have to make the internship yours. What we mean by this is if you feel you are being under-utilized or not learning the things you came there to learn, communicate with your superiors and professionally let them know what you would like to do differently. The more things you can get your bosses to let you do that will be a learning experience for you, the better the internship will be. You want to make your mark on the turf facility but you also want it to make its mark on you so that you will be a better turf manager in the future.

Weekly Completion Sheet (EXAMPLE- blank sheet located on next page)

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

I learned how to set up the golf course for play, how to fertilize with a rotary walk-behind spreader, how to walk-mow greens, how to set up the job board for the next day.

Name important tasks you completed.

Fertilized perimeters, walk-mowed greens, set-up the golf course for play, mowed fairways, assisted with an irrigation leak, and detailed the pine straw beds with imported pine straw.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

How do I calibrate a rotary spreader, What is the most important part of set-up, What can I do to improve my mowing skills

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week? 7

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Yes, we hosted the Glacier Club member guest tournament this weekend. I learned how to improve green speed through cultural practices and the details that go along with hosting a big important tournament.

Weekly Completion Sheet

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

Name important tasks you completed.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week?

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Did you achieve your week's goal and how; what is your goal for next week?

Weekly Completion Sheet

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

Name important tasks you completed.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week?

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Did you achieve your week's goal and how; what is your goal for next week?

Weekly Completion Sheet

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

Name important tasks you completed.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week?

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Did you achieve your week's goal and how; what is your goal for next week?

Weekly Completion Sheet

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

Name important tasks you completed.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week?

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Did you achieve your week's goal and how; what is your goal for next week?

Weekly Completion Sheet

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

Name important tasks you completed.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week?

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Did you achieve your week's goal and how; what is your goal for next week?

Weekly Completion Sheet

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

Name important tasks you completed.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week?

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Did you achieve your week's goal and how; what is your goal for next week?

Weekly Completion Sheet

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

Name important tasks you completed.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week?

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Did you achieve your week's goal and how; what is your goal for next week?

Weekly Completion Sheet

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

Name important tasks you completed.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week?

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Did you achieve your week's goal and how; what is your goal for next week?

Weekly Completion Sheet

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

Name important tasks you completed.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week?

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Did you achieve your week's goal and how; what is your goal for next week?

Weekly Completion Sheet

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

Name important tasks you completed.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week?

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Did you achieve your week's goal and how; what is your goal for next week?

Weekly Completion Sheet

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

Name important tasks you completed.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week?

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Did you achieve your week's goal and how; what is your goal for next week?

Weekly Completion Sheet

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

Name important tasks you completed.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week?

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Did you achieve your week's goal and how; what is your goal for next week?

Weekly Completion Sheet

Date_____

What did you learn this week that you had no to little previous knowledge of?

Name important tasks you completed.

What important questions did you ask your superiors this week?

On a scale of 1-10, how well did you communicate with your bosses and other employees this week?

Did you assist with any special events or tournaments this week?

Did you achieve your week's goal and how; what is your goal for next week?

Post Internship

Keep in mind that this a learning experience for you, but this will also be a learning experience for faculty and for your peers. The way you will teach the faculty and your peers about what you did at your internship is through a 10-20 minute presentation the semester after you complete your internship. This will help faculty and your peers understand more about your personal experience while also providing a good reference for future student who are thinking about the same internship position.

Presentation

As previously stated, this will be a 10-20 minute presentation on your internship experience. We would recommend taking lots of pictures over the course of your internship to include in this presentation. This will help your audience get a visual idea of what you did and how you did it. Some ideas for areas to focus on are: background info, long and short-term goals and if you achieved them, things you learned, and how you would describe or recommend this internship to future turf students.

Recommendation

In addition to the presentation, you will write a 1-2 page recommendation regarding how your internship went. You will also discuss whether or not you would recommend this internship to another student. Be honest in your recommendation as no one besides future students and faculty will see these. We want you to help future students get ideas on where they could possibly do an internship and if selected, what to expect out of that experience.

We hope this manual helped you make the most out of the turfgrass internship experience. It was designed by Joe Villela and Justin Painter to help fellow students and better the turfgrass internship program here at New Mexico State. Best of luck to all current and future turf Aggies.