

# The Career Value of Work-Based Learning

## A Closer Look: Unpaid Internship

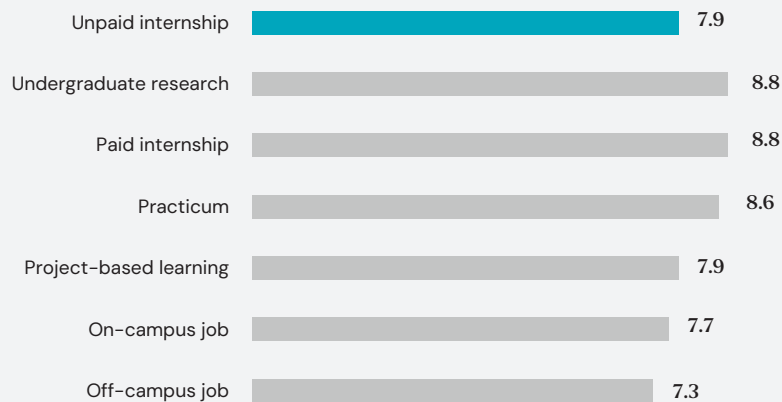
An unpaid internship is a non-compensated position held within an established company or organization while also completing a college degree, certificate, or diploma program and performing tasks similar to tasks done by entry-level employees.

The National Survey of Work-Based Learning is a nationally representative sample of seniors enrolled at public four-year universities and colleges. Students responded to questions about seven different models that blend academic learning and authentic or work-based experiences.

### OVERALL CAREER VALUE

**7.9/10**

*Please rate the extent to which your experience makes you a stronger candidate for the kind of job you want (on a scale from 1 to 10).*



### TOP MAJORS

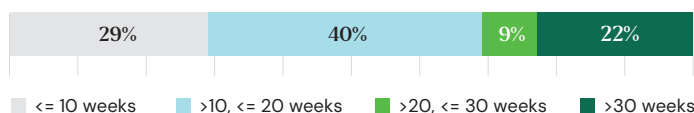
Students majoring in these fields were the most likely to report having an unpaid internship:

- Health sciences (not including nursing)
- Liberal arts and social sciences
- Education

### DURATION

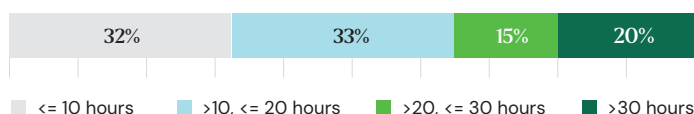
On average, unpaid internships spanned 21 weeks.

*For how many weeks did/will you participate in the experience?*



Students spent an average of 21 hours a week in their unpaid internships, though about a third worked 10 hours or fewer.

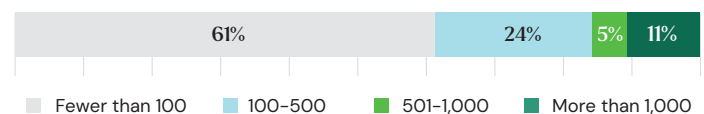
*In a typical week, how many hours did/will you participate in the experience?*



### EMPLOYER CHARACTERISTICS

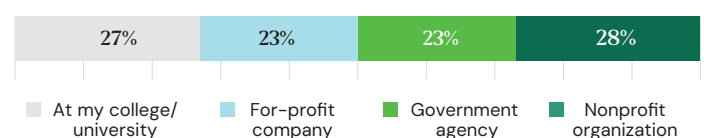
**Size:** The majority of students with unpaid internships had their experience with a small employer.

*About how many employees work at the organization where you had your experience?*



**Organization type:** Students reported they had unpaid internship experiences in a variety of employer settings.

*At what type of organization was the experience?*



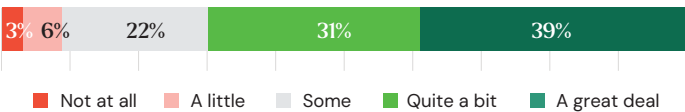
PAY

0% – by definition

TECHNICAL SKILLS

69% of students said they experienced meaningful development of their technical skills.

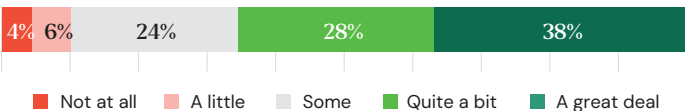
Please rate the following aspect of your experience using the scale below: This experience helped me to develop technical skills relevant to my career goals.



SOCIAL CAPITAL

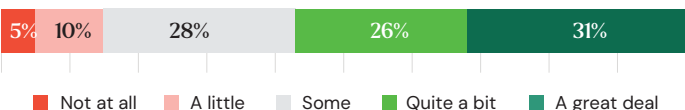
Two-thirds of students reported they substantially expanded their professional networks.

To what extent do you think your experience expanded your professional network?



More than half of students met people they felt would help their career opportunities.

How helpful do you think people you met in your experience will be for career opportunities?



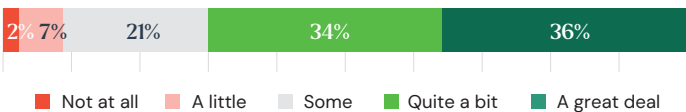
ACADEMIC CREDIT

73% of students reported receiving academic credit for at least one of their unpaid internships.

BROAD SKILLS

70% of students said they experienced meaningful development of skills broadly relevant to career opportunities.

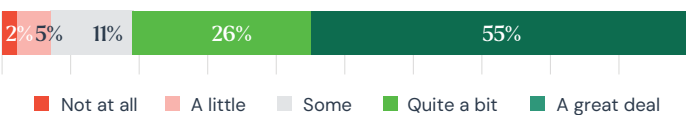
Please rate the following aspect of your experience using the scale below: This experience helped me to develop broad skills relevant to a range of different careers.



MENTORSHIP

Over 80% of students reported high levels of career-focused mentorship.

To what extent did your supervisor provide mentorship to support your career goals?



Figures in this document are in reference to the single work-based learning experience students selected as their most valuable; if they only had one experience, these figures are in reference to that experience. The majors section is an exception: these are the most common work-based learning experiences pursued within each major.

Percentages referenced in this document may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

The National Survey of Work-Based Learning is a 15-minute online survey fielded to a sample of seniors enrolled at public four-year universities and colleges from October to December 2024 (n=2,131). The survey is nationally representative by race/ethnicity, gender, and field of study, and was developed in partnership between Strada Education Foundation and the Center for College Workforce Transitions (CCWT) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.