Before jumping into the kinds of experiences you might pursue, it is important to remember exactly why gaining experience is so relevant in the first place. Workplace experience is one of the best ways to investigate whether a career area is appropriate for you. You will learn whether or not you enjoy a field by actively engaging in opportunities within it or related to it. Internships, externships and summer jobs let you test out your options for a short-term period.

Workplace experience is also highly valued by potential employers – even if it is short-term or volunteer work. The experiences on your resume demonstrate your interest in a career field and the career-specific skills you have developed. Demonstrated interest and skills are strong indicators of your ability to contribute and succeed in a specific field or organization.

Some job opportunities can develop out of summer jobs, internships, externships, volunteering, or networking with career professionals (see our handout on “Networking”). Having seen the quality of your work in these settings, an employer can hire you with confidence.

WAYS TO GAIN EXPERIENCE

Coursework

While internships, externships, and jobs may seem like the most obvious ways to build experience, one easy way to get a feel for a career area is to choose academic courses accordingly. If you think you might be interested in a business career, consider taking a course in commerce, finance, or accounting. If you think you’d like to do scientific research, enroll in some lab science courses. Additionally, the assignments and projects you complete demonstrate your interest and aptitude for that field.

Some courses have fieldwork or a practicum associated with them. You may also want to think about doing an independent study or directed research with a professor of your choice. Look at the “Quick Start Guide” uvaum.org/undergraduate-research-a-quick-how-to for ideas.

Networking

Having conversations with people who have careers of interest to you is one of the best ways to test your interest in that field, and it can also lead to more experience-building opportunities.

Externsprships

Externsprships are a low-risk way to explore a career in the short-term, whether over the summer, a few times during the semester, or as part of your Spring Break or J-Term experience. If you would like to learn how to establish your own externship, make an appointment with a career counselor or visit our website at career.virginia.edu/internships.

Extracurricular Activities/Volunteering

Extracurricular activities are an excellent way to explore your career-related interests and develop skills you can transfer to the workplace. If you think you may be interested in a customer or client-based role, look into student leadership opportunities, such as Orientation Leader in the summer. If writing for print or online media is one of your career ideas, consider joining the staff of the Cavalier Daily or another local publication. Do you like to lead people and projects? Find out how you can get involved with Student Council or other forms of student government. There are hundreds of extracurricular activities in which you can become involved in. Also, few non-profit employers will turn down the services of an industrious, cheerful, and interested volunteer. Volunteering is a great way to gain experience and professional contacts who can help you secure a paying job later. Visit the UVA Learning in Action website at publicservice.virginia.edu for additional ideas.

Summer Jobs/Part-Time Work/Temping

These experiences differ from internships in the sense that you are typically assured wages for your efforts. The type of work involved may or may not be project-based like some internships. Many companies will hire you for the summer so that you can demonstrate how you will help their organizations. These positions can help you develop valuable skills and gain experience in a professional setting.

TIP: The best way to get hired is to directly contact employers instead of relying on advertised positions. Advertisements are intended to be highly visible and, by nature, they make the position more competitive.

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TIP: The best way to get hired is to directly contact employers of interest instead of relying on advertised positions. Advertisements are intended to be highly visible and, by nature, they make the position more competitive.
**EXPERIENTIAL INTERNSHIPS**

The UVA Career Center receives hundreds of internship notices from organizations and alumni throughout the country. Occasionally, we will send this information out via targeted e-mails. Here are additional resources.

**Handshake**

[http://virginia.joinhandshake.com](http://virginia.joinhandshake.com)

is an online listing service that includes jobs, internships, and externships. You may search the listings based on your geographic preference, industry, major, or by company name.

**Print and Online Resources**

[http://career.virginia.edu/internships](http://career.virginia.edu/internships)

We have over 100 resources for finding internships in many different career fields and locations, included several internship search tools exclusively for UVA students.

**Programs**

[http://career.virginia.edu/calendar](http://career.virginia.edu/calendar)

Our Career Peer Educators conduct in-office workshops that show students all the essentials they need to start an internship search. For the latest dates and times, see the Career Center's Web Calendar and pre-register for a session on Handshake.

**Internship Advising**

Visit a career counselor during open office hours (M-F from 12-5pm in Newcomb 170 or 1515 2nd Floor) or set up an individual career counseling appointment through Handshake or you can call the Career Center at (434) 924-8900.

**Fairs**

[http://career.virginia.edu/calendar/career-fairs](http://career.virginia.edu/calendar/career-fairs)

Every year, the Career Center hosts several career fairs where employers come to UVA to discuss their internship opportunities with interested students. Check the Handshake Calendar for upcoming fair info and employer lists.

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**ACADEMIC INTERNSHIPS**

Some internships can be taken for academic credit. They are most often unpaid and usually last for one or two semesters. Some academic departments sponsor internships, and will determine the relevant policies and guidelines, academic work assigned, and amount of credit granted.

Employers also sponsor academic internships. In these situations, the student generally bears the responsibility of finding a way to earn credit on their own. Although internship advising is available at the Career Center to help you find your internship, we are not an academic department and cannot offer credit. If you independently acquire an internship and need to receive credit, it may be possible for you to contract with either the University Internship Program or a professor who teaches a subject related to the internship. In the latter situation, it is also advisable for you to consult with your academic advisor.

**Internship Placement Program**

[http://career.virginia.edu/ipp](http://career.virginia.edu/ipp)

The Internship Placement Program team will match you based on the best opportunities for your interests, skills, and goals. We will help you develop your skills and knowledge through a Professional Development Workshop and provide ongoing support in all aspects of your internship experience. Program internships can be paid or unpaid and may be pursued for credit.

**Advanced Program**

Connect your internship with a semester-long one credit internship reflection course (UNST 2820) to enhance the internship experience. The course is offered during the fall and spring semesters features topics such as organizational development, leadership, team dynamics, professional skills, and career management to deepen your understanding and internship work. The course is completed concurrently or post internship.
STEP BY STEP “HOW-TO”

1. SET YOUR PRIORITIES
Consider what you are looking for in a summer experience:
- Building your resume
- Adventure and/or travel
- Monetary compensation
- Exploring or testing your career interests
- Providing service to others
- Preparing for a job after graduation
- Applying knowledge and skills from your major
- Working in your hometown
- Working in Charlottesville

2. EVALUATE YOUR NEEDS
You will benefit enormously from getting “real life” work experience while you are still in college. To some extent, the type of jobs available to you depends upon your qualifications, your access to transportation, and your financial needs. You’ll need to consider the cost of living if you decide not to live with your family. Remember: salary is important, but there are other benefits of a summer opportunity.

3. DETERMINE YOUR STRENGTHS
As you begin to set your priorities, it is also important to begin to think about what you have to offer a prospective employer. What personal traits, skills, and experience do you hope to “sell”?
- I learn quickly.
- I have great people skills.
- I am responsible.
- I write well.
- I’m good with numbers.
- I speak Chinese.
- I’m very analytical.
- I’m accurate with details.

Not sure what skills to promote? Check out the top ten attributes employers seek from a candidate from the 2017 National Association of Colleges and Employers
1. Problem-solving skills
2. Ability to work in a team
3. Written communication skills
4. Leadership
5. Strong work ethic
6. Analytical/quantitative skills
7. Verbal communication skills
8. Initiative
9. Detail-oriented
10. Flexibility/adaptability

4. RESEARCH YOUR OPTIONS
- “Resources” tab in Handshake (e.g. PolicyJobs, ArtSearch).
- career.virginia.edu/internships
- Talk to friends, parents, and alumni. Develop a network of career contacts.
- Use social media to connect to employers and organizations you like. Follow blogs or connect with recruiters on LinkedIn. Find employers that potentially may need summer help, but haven’t advertised it yet.
- Directly contact employers of interest. Check out the Hoos Career Guide (available in print or on the UVA Career Center website) for examples of emails and telephone scripts.

5. TAKE ACTION!
If you feel that your network of personal contacts is weak, expand it! There is some truth to the saying that “it’s who you know” that can matter. The people in your network can be a great advantage to you – often, personal contacts can suggest employment leads or introduce you to people who may have positions available. Remember the “5 Fs” – friends, family, faculty, fellow peers and alumni, and former supervisors. Get them to network for you—you may be surprised just how many connections they have!

Identify organizations for which you would like to work and try to get names of people within them. Take the initiative to seek advice from professionals in your career field about how you can acquire some experience. Seeking advice and information is a legitimate means of increasing your understanding of a particular career field and getting summer job leads.

6. TIMING YOUR INTERNSHIP SEARCH
One strategy for developing your timeline is to determine when application deadlines generally take place for your career field of interest, then working backwards to plan enough time for researching opportunities and preparing your materials (i.e. resume, cover letter, formal application essays, etc.).

Although there is no “one size fits all” timeline for the internship search process, general guidelines can provide a basic time frame in which to research, plan, and apply. When in doubt, always start early! At least begin thinking about what you want to learn about and contact the UVA Career Center in the fall semester. If application deadlines do not come up until spring, by getting your priorities in order, you can rest assured that you will be ready.

A FINAL NOTE
Regardless of how you spend your summer or your free time during the academic year, make sure to update your resume at the end of the experience while it is still fresh in your mind. You may also choose to send thank-you notes to your direct supervisor and other colleagues, and let them know if you would like to use them as references in the future. And don’t forget to connect with any and all colleagues on LinkedIn so that you can start building your professional network!