

How to Get a Summer Internship in the Construction Industry

Technical Description:

The following instructions are intended to help an undergraduate student in a construction-related major gain employment as a summer intern. An internship in the construction industry is an imperative step for any undergraduate building construction or construction-engineering student hoping to gain full-time employment after graduation. Prospective employers hire interns throughout the academic year, although most are hired as a result of job fairs organized by their academic department. Summer interns are hired to work during the summer months, in between the spring and fall semesters.

Summer internships are the best way for undergraduate construction students to learn about the construction field from a real-world perspective. The classroom education, especially for an industry like construction, is just not enough to prepare one for their career. While the classroom instruction is ultimately very important, it needs to be supplemented with real-life experience in order for the student to have a complete understanding of the industry. The most successful interns are those that apply the knowledge they gained in the classroom to their internship, thus reinforcing important concepts and real-world situations.



Those graduating with a construction-related undergraduate degree generally become employed in one of three career paths; estimator, project manager or superintendent. Working a summer internship helps undergraduate students determine which path they want to pursue upon graduation. Many large general contracting firms' summer internships offer a job rotation program so that an intern can become exposed to all three different career paths. This allows their interns to gauge their interest in each position so that they have a better idea of which career fits with their goals in the long-term.

Prospective employers offer internship programs so that they can determine which interns they want to employ full-time after graduation. The employers can observe first-hand how the prospective employee works within their company and their culture. Summer internship programs essentially act as summer-long interviews for full-time positions down the road.

Many universities with large undergraduate construction programs offer career fairs for their students, such as Virginia Tech's Myers Lawson School of Construction (MLSoC). The MLSoC hosts

career fairs in the fall and spring, typically in October and February, respectively. The best way to land a summer internship is to attend both fairs. The school invites prospective employers in the industry who are looking to hire for summer internships, co-ops, and full-time employment. Career fairs are typically held on two consecutive days; the first day allows students to speak with employers at their booths and the second day is reserved for formal interviews.

Glossary

Career fair: provides a convenient location for students to meet employers and perform first interviews.

Co-Op: joint venture between the university, a selected employer and a student. Some allow student to receive academic credit while working full-time in the industry. Usually involve working for multiple terms; e.g. working in the summer and the following fall semester, then returning to school for the following spring semester.

Estimator: makes approximations and quantifies what materials and manpower are required for the construction project to determine a close estimate of the actual cost.

Superintendent: runs the day-to-day operations on the construction site and control the short-term schedule, including subcontractor coordination and quality control.

Project Manager: responsible for managing all aspects of project procurement including, but not limited to; project communication, risk, conflicts, schedule, budget, and delivery.

Myers Lawson School of Construction (MLSoC): joint venture between the College of Architecture and Urban Studies and the College of Engineering at Virginia Tech. It offers degrees in building construction and construction engineering and management.

Step-by-Step Instructions

The following steps lay out the process to obtaining an internship in the construction industry. With the appropriate preparation and tools, any undergraduate student in a construction-related major can gain employment as a summer intern.

1. Research Prospective Employers.

Research the companies that will be attending the career fair. Decide which companies you will speak with. Prepare a list of the companies you plan to talk to. The MLSoC publishes a list of attending companies and their booth numbers on their webpage at least two weeks before each career fair.

Companies Attending the Spring 2014 Construction Career Fair

→ LIST OF COMPANIES AT THIS CAREER FAIR

→ COMPANY LIST WITH BOOTH NUMBERS

→ ROOM LAYOUT



Tip: Use the room layout provided by the MLSoC, along with the booth numbers, to map out your route through the fair. This prevents you from frequently passing a company you are interested in.

- ### 2. Attend Career Fair.
- Dress appropriately; business formal is the accepted attire. Bring a portfolio with multiple copies of your resume. Be enthusiastic, proactive and ask questions that you are genuinely interested in knowing the answer to. Be attentive and listen to the prospective employer. Don't interrupt the company representatives or any fellow peers. Ask each prospective employer for their business card and if they would like to connect on LinkedIn. At the end of the conversation, thank them for their time.



- ### 3. Schedule and Attend Interviews.
- Ask the prospective employees if they will be holding interviews the following day. Make sure when scheduling interviews, there is enough time in between each interview so that you are not late. Prepare for the interview by preparing a few questions to ask each prospective employer. Dress appropriately for the interview; business formal is the accepted attire.

- ### 4. Write Thank-You Letters.
- Write a follow-up thank you letters to each company you interviewed with. If the interview was set-up via email then an email thank-you note is acceptable. However, if the interview was set-up over the phone, a handwritten thank-you is more



appropriate. In this day in age, a handwritten note will always carry more weight in the eyes of the prospective employer. In your thank you letter include something that will jog the interviewers memory. This will set you apart from the rest of the candidates. Send thank-you letters within 24 hours of the interview.

5. **Receive Offers.** Within about two weeks or so, the prospective employer should be in contact. They will either send an offer letter, request further action such as a phone interview, or they will decline you the internship.
6. **Accept or Decline Offers.** If you receive multiple offers, determine which one you will accept and return the signed offer letter. Respectively decline the other offers, stating you accepted another offer but you would like to remain in contact for the future.



Conclusion

If you received an internship offer, congratulations! Make the most of the opportunity and remember that construction is a tight-knit industry, so don't burn any bridges. If you didn't receive any internship offers, look out for emails to the MLSoC listserv, there are usually internship opportunities available after the career fair. Good luck!