

CHAPTER 14

Internships for Interdisciplinary International Relations and International Studies Programs: Comparing Benefits and Challenges from West to East

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This chapter sheds light on processes, challenges, and benefits of International Relations (IR) and International Studies (IS) internships through a comparison of two programs, one on the West Coast and the other on the East Coast of the US. After describing different program structures and resources needed to build IR/IS programs and support international students in the US and abroad, we explore creative ways to expand opportunities for IR/IS students in local communities. We review practical challenges and offer a set of solutions to address them.

INTRODUCTION

Most political science departments have internship programs primarily designed for students to participate “in the political process and [...] gain insight into the nature of political institutions” (Auerbach 2021). These opportunities allow students to participate in work that complements their undergraduate classroom experience and ideally is supervised by an internship advisor or mentor (Ediger 2010, 243). We know from research and practice that these types of opportunities provide an important form of field-based experiential learning that entails applying theoretical knowledge from the political science curriculum to “real-world” and “hands-on” practice, and vice-versa (Bennion 2015). However, due to the interdisciplinary nature of international relations and international studies, which can be standalone interdisciplinary majors based in political science at some institutions, experiential education in these areas must be tailored to apply theoretical knowledge specific to international relations/international studies (IR/IS) problems and analyze actual and potential actions by governments, international organizations, private companies, non-government organizations (NGOs), and citizens. Compared to political science internships that more commonly deal with US political processes or public affairs, IR/IS internships address public service components through the examination of inter-state actions, state-to-non-state

actor interaction, or even public organizations that interact with private market participants. As a result, political science internships in local, state, or national levels of government may be of limited interest and utility for IR/IS students. The key challenge, then, is to provide internationally focused internship opportunities for globally-engaged students and do so inclusively.

This chapter seeks to shed light on the processes, benefits, and challenges of serving interns in political science and IR/IS. It begins with a general overview of the parameters of an IR/IS internship and a discussion of initial steps to take in order to offer such internships. After briefly comparing how two programs—one at a private institution on the West Coast of the United States and the other at a public institution on the East Coast—handle these internships, we explore the unique hurdles associated with them and how to overcome them. If political science as a discipline seeks to serve all of its majors equally by offering impactful, experiential learning across subfields, then better understanding of these placements is needed, and sufficient resources must be supplied to support them, potentially in tandem with interdisciplinary programs.

THE IR/IS INTERNSHIP

Compared to political science internships, IR/IS internships encompass a wider range of academic and applied learning options. First, many institutions have interdisciplinary international studies majors, stand-alone international relations majors, or concentrations in IR/IS. Students pursue these majors because they recognize, just as their mentors do, that “international studies offers an integrative, comprehensive, and interdisciplinary approach to issues of global importance” (Anderson et al. 2015, 3). A primary learning goal is that students are able to understand and analyze “global interactions, the tensions that these interactions produce, and the forces and actors that play a role in them” (Straus and Driscoll 2019, 4).

One of the hallmarks of an interdisciplinary major is its flexibility. IR majors are usually housed in or offered in conjunction with a political science major, but IS majors usually integrate knowledge from some or all of the following disciplines: anthropology, economics, geography, history, and political science, in addition to various foreign languages. Other departments’ courses may also be used for credit, such as art/art history, music, and sociology. Thus, flexibility creates the need to incorporate learning objectives and offerings from several departments while maintaining an explicitly international or non-native focus. Although the literature clearly defines internships and delineates critical dimensions of an internship, there is nothing that determines disciplinary scope, particularly for IR/IS majors (Maertz 2014). For IR/IS students, the principal internship learning objectives include, among others: professional development through the application of IR/IS-specific content and skills; effective self-reflection; teamwork; career preparation; and networking.¹ The effectiveness of internship placements depends on the extent to which they provide students a chance to study key questions of international security, international political economy, foreign policy analysis, diplomacy, international negotiation, working within and between various cultures and societies, international human rights, and international and environmental justice.

Following Bennion (2015), it is clear that the disciplinary embrace of internships depends on whether the hands-on learning outside of the classroom furthers the discipline-defined learning objectives. Because some IR/IS programs are interdisciplinary, internships must reflect that scope, and thus the parameters of IR/IS internships tend to be wider. Some of these placements, such as embassies, consulates, and NGOs that work with immigrant and migrant groups, often require a working knowledge or fluency in a foreign language. Indeed, global competencies can be important selling points on a prospective intern’s résumé even when these are not explicitly required. One of the hallmarks of the IR/IS major is its flexibility, meaning that majors are encouraged to make connections among different silos of disciplinary knowledge to understand and analyze the world around them, and this flexibility helps enlarge their internship options beyond a single discipline.²

THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS INTERNSHIP AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (USC): AN OVERVIEW

The International Relations Undergraduate Program at the University of Southern California (USC), was formed as an independent School of International Relations (SIR), but is now part of a joint Political Science and International Relations Department.³

The undergraduate program in International Relations serves approximately 700 students across four separate majors: International Relations (IR), IR-Global Business (IRGB), IR-Global Economy (IRGE), and the most recently added Intelligence and Cyber Operations (INCO) major. Only the first two participate in the IR internship program, so we will refer only to those in this chapter. The IR major largely appeals to students interested in international affairs and those who wish to understand how global developments affect their lives and work. IRGB is an interdisciplinary major overseen by the IR program and the USC Business School. It attracts students who are interested in relations among states and other international actors in the context of the global economy.

The International Relations internship program was established in 2015 in response to the needs of dual constituencies: students who are eager to find more internship positions and community employers who are looking to hire students in conjunction with school credit.⁴ This nationwide move to internships-for-credit is not without critics, particularly as these requirements can be viewed as an excuse for not paying interns (Yagoda 2008). Our IR program recognizes that for some students, the course opens opportunities that are obtainable only during the academic year when they receive financial aid. When enrolled full-time during the school year, students can apply their financial aid to cover living expenses for which they would otherwise be responsible.

The IR internship program is offered as an independent study course that can count as an elective 2-unit upper-division course for any of the majors above. The course can be taken twice for a total of 4 units applied to the major. The instructor of record is in charge of recruiting and assisting with student placement, and there is no formal administrative assistance to run and maintain the program. The course is not a requirement for any of the IR/IS majors, and most students pursue internships, without credit, on their own, or earn non-major credit in other programs such as Political Science.⁵ An informal survey of upper-division students revealed that about 60% had completed an internship by fall 2020,⁶ yet the formal internship course only serves about 30 students per year.⁷ Clearly these numbers indicate that the IR internship program serves only a small subset of students who pursue internships during their time at USC.

Students in the USC International Relations internship program can find help with landing a placement in three main ways. First, because the program is situated in a university with a rich professional network, students have access to a robust job and internship online database.⁸ Second, students can get help from a designated social science advisor in the College of Letters and Sciences' own career center who can recommend strategies for a targeted search and offer help to strengthen the student's application materials. The third resource is the department itself: students can approach the internship course faculty instructor when they need assistance with identifying opportunities, even if they ultimately do not sign up for the class. More details about the program and the course (and those at Towson University) are shared in the Supplemental Internship Resources.

THE INTERNATIONAL STUDIES INTERNSHIP AT TOWSON UNIVERSITY (TU): AN OVERVIEW

Towson University (TU) is a public, comprehensive, four-year institution located just outside of Baltimore, Maryland. Enrollment reached close to 20,000 undergraduates for the 2020–2021 academic year.⁹ The International Studies (INST) major seeks to develop a global perspective through an interdisciplinary network of courses and learning experiences. The program is based on six “foundation” departments—Anthropology, Economics, Foreign Languages, Geography, History, and Political Science—and draws upon upper-level elective courses from a wide variety of disciplines, spanning Art History, Finance, Philosophy, and Religious Studies. The director is a faculty member from one of the

participating departments, and an interdisciplinary committee of faculty members helps to administer the program, which includes approximately 225 students, mostly majors.¹⁰ Because this major was established in the 1970s when the university's enrollment was less than half of what it is today, management of its interdisciplinary aspects, such as enrolling in courses in several different departments and including them as INST electives, was easily achieved. In 2009, a paid, part-time faculty director was added after substantial increases in overall university enrollment had occurred and the number of students majoring or minoring in INST rose to over 150 students, more than double the figure in 1995. The INST internship class counts as the practicum requirement for the major, which can be fulfilled either through an internship, independent study course, or a thesis course in a foundation department with the director's approval or through a 3-credit study abroad course in any department.¹¹ The number of students enrolled in the designated INST internship course averaged 8.5 students per year from 2004 to 2016 (the 12-year period referenced in this section; including summers), but this total excludes all INST majors who simply did internships for credit without enrolling in the course.¹²

Students are responsible for obtaining their own placements, which can be found through the University's Career Center, the INST website, or INST's physical bulletin board, all of which supply work descriptions and contact information. From 2004 to 2016, about half of TU's 93 international studies internships were in Washington, DC. The remainder were conducted mostly in the Baltimore area, while a handful were in the state capitol, Annapolis, and three were conducted abroad.¹³ Gaining local placement—i.e., positions located near the university—was a popular option because most TU students work part-time and lack the time to commute to DC two to three days per week, a general requirement for in-person or hybrid internships. This option also appealed to our non-traditional-age students who often had not only another job but also family responsibilities. Until the COVID-19 pandemic, none were conducted online. When students do their internships abroad, mid-semester check-ins are completed through email communication and assignments are accepted via email rather than in person.

COMMON CHALLENGES WITH INTERNATIONAL INTERNSHIPS AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

We identify four key challenges associated with IR/IS internships. The first set of challenges relates to student placements—(those near home, meaning the student's home campus, and those in internships abroad)—and the related issue of how to properly disseminate internship-related information to students. The remaining three challenges are assessment, pre-professional support for students, and those related to costs and financial aid. As we discuss each, we also present actual or possible solutions that faculty, supervisors, and university administrators should undertake or consider. At base, these recommendations also aim to include a wider variety of students in international learning opportunities.

1. Placements

Local Placements (Near the Student's College or University)

Typically, IR/IS students desire opportunities directly related to foreign policy and international security such as the State Department, premier think tanks, and research centers. As the Baltimore area is just over an hour's drive or commuter train ride to Washington, DC, Towson students with adequate time in their weekly schedules are able to fill available positions among the many options in the metro-DC area—in government and at embassies, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations—in addition to those offered through TU's partnership with the Washington Center.¹⁴ A similar option is available to a select few USC students who attend the USC-DC program during the spring semester. Consulates in LA (totaling 99 as of 2021) are attractive to USC students who speak foreign languages. Their work assignments range from media and communications support to policy research, and from business development research to preparatory work for trade negotiations.

Unfortunately, while these opportunities are a natural fit for IR/IS students, they are much more limited elsewhere in the US (outside of major cities), and even East Coast students can be constrained by family, transportation, or economic situations. These limitations complicate academic year placements, particularly for students attending courses in-person. Completely online internships¹⁵ can mit-

igate some of these concerns, but for students who prefer in-person options, internship programs need to actively expand the scope of what is considered an internationally focused internship. Moreover, not all IR/IS students envision careers in the State Department or internationally recognized policy think tanks; some IR/IS career trajectories lead to the private sector. To prepare our students, internship placements have to complement such career trajectories. We also must consider other options by carving out space for IR/IS projects in domestic internships to accommodate non-traditional age students who have family obligations and thus less flexible schedules. Further, internships that count for IR/IS but are in local, state, or national offices can be the best option for international students who are already studying abroad in the US and need more exposure to American governmental processes.

A successful way of expanding placement opportunities for IR/IS students, we posit, is to connect students with local-global options. For cities such as Baltimore and LA, both multi-ethnic port cities with many businesses engaged in international trade, such options are plentiful. For example, local government internships can be tremendously valuable learning opportunities for students who want to examine how local governance issues are connected to inter-state relations or how the private sector engages with government leaders. For example, USC students have held positions in the Mayor's Office of International Affairs and the Office for Economic Opportunity. Others have worked on expanding educational exchanges, public diplomacy interactions, foreign direct investment opportunities, city transportation contracting, and expanding trade opportunities for domestic firms in foreign markets. LA's successful bid to host the 2028 Olympics created opportunities for students to work in the area of international sports diplomacy, but cities host other major sporting events that require official interaction with international governing bodies or other governments to facilitate contract negotiations, dignitary visits, and cultural exchanges surrounding those events. Increasingly, city governments are procuring goods and services from international suppliers; at the LA County Department of Transportation, students have worked on projects requesting bids from Japanese manufacturers of light-rail train cars. Similarly, government officials may recognize opportunities for student involvement when funders or foreign companies show interest in local investment opportunities. IR/IS students may gain a front-row seat to negotiations that involve questions of regulatory compliance, international trade rules, international financial flows, and international law.

NGOs and non-profit organizations are additional sources of internationally focused internships that examine local-global connections. Locally based organizations such as the International Rescue Committee, the Youth Refugee Project, and the Interfaith Refugee and Immigration Service are dedicated to refugees and immigration-related issues; Catholic Relief Services, Lutheran World Relief, and the Red Cross work on international and humanitarian aid; and others such as Baltimore's Council of Foreign Affairs and the World Trade Center Institute, or LA's World Affairs Council and Pacific Council on International Policy, are devoted to global engagement and international policy. These options are helpful to IR/IS students not just because they offer locally based work related to students' global interests, but also because they often offer programming and events that represent potential learning opportunities for students who intern there.

Additionally, local chambers of commerce and various trade associations, as well as union offices, could accommodate students with interests in international political economy. Students at these sites benefit from studying government-business relations, and they can often capitalize on close access in order to interview or survey business leaders on topics related to their internship class-related research projects. To illustrate IR/IS program flexibility in using a local government experience to satisfy the IR/IS internship requirements, we note the example of local non-profits that join federally-funded efforts to address homelessness; students have pointed out that placements in this area can be valuable for those who want to work in the field of poverty alleviation in international development. They recognize important lessons, such as the fact that provisioning direct assistance and matching services with target recipients are challenges for any aid-based project, and students believe that they have much to learn by comparing local and international initiatives. Fittingly, one USC student interested in international development worked for a non-profit that was serving Syrian refugees in Greece and wanted to adopt a similar model to serve the LA homeless population. Policy issue areas that are also realized on an international scale represent potential places where students can look to apply their IR knowledge, gain skills, and work on projects near the home campus.

One of the more underutilized sources of internationally focused internships is private sector op-

portunities in local communities, and our experience suggests that they are among the most promising partners in solving the placement problem for IR/IS students. Numerous law firms that work on issues linked to international relations represent a category of such private sector employers. These include firms that work on cases involving human rights abuses, citizenship, migration, domestic abuse, asylum, and workplace labor laws, including unlawful violations exposed by undocumented immigrants. Students with interests in international law and human rights are drawn to them (it is worth noting that they often require students to be proficient in other languages). Other private employers also have opportunities for students to interact with international law, government policy, and government regulations.

Expanding placement options for IR/IS students in the private sector requires dedicated work by the program coordinator to match students' interests and skills to employers' programs and agendas. To do so, rather than focusing solely on the day-to-day activities that the student will perform, the program coordinator should think of the entire sum of the learning experience, including assignments such as research projects that the student will complete as part of their internship program. For example, a student working in the Port of Los Angeles on contract management interviewed the manager and other contacts in Singapore and Norway to complete a project examining how various global ports respond to sustainability initiatives.¹⁶ Similarly, a student interested in journalism was placed with the communications and media team for the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, a NASA space exploration center, typically considered an employer for engineering students in the LA area. The student used her skills to examine more broadly how NASA communications and media campaigns contribute to American public diplomacy and project "soft" power internationally. What these examples purposefully illustrate is how the work for the private employer, when combined with the research project in the internship course, can advance IR/IS learning by enabling students to examine questions, in theory and in practice, that further their education.

Increasingly, large movie studios and entertainment companies like Disney and Sony host interns whose interests lie in open-source intelligence and cybersecurity. These students get a chance to apply political risk analysis learned in the classroom to various projects for private-sector clients who need threat assessments for internationally based asset protection. Students working for real estate and investment firms can also apply theoretical classroom knowledge to day-to-day work. Given that these sectors continue to internationalize in terms of investors and customers, students can engage in work examining compliance with international business law, federal visa policies, intellectual property rights, and international trade trends. Even tech startups can offer relevant opportunities, especially for interns interested in international entrepreneurship and business development; they benefit from broad exposure to business development matters while addressing specific issues such as intellectual property protection, international patent trolling and theft, the influx of international venture capital, or the impact of international trade conflicts. Normally, students interested in public affairs would not be matched to positions in private enterprise, but students who wish to work on private sector development from a public policy perspective could be encouraged to intern for these types of employers in government liaison or government policy capacities. Placing students in these private sector opportunities could have the added bonus of reinforcing business community ties to the university which can be useful for future job placement and potential fund-raising (Alpert 2009).

We maintain that the private sector represents the largest untapped source of creative internationally focused projects, hands-on experiences, and opportunities to build career-enhancing skills. Yet developing these placements significantly increases the workload for faculty instructors who also have to mentor students through the process of self-assessment (to determine interests and goals), and also help find and negotiate placements that strategically match student interests to employer needs. Furthermore, faculty need to invest significant time in seeking out, cultivating, and maintaining ties with the business community in order to expand their base of internship providers. To ensure program stability and sustainability, we recommend that at least one program administrator be hired to assume or share responsibility for dedicated work such as matching students with potential internship employers, identifying and following up with potential providers in local communities, maintaining contact with providers who are already in a database, and offering general administrative support in order to reduce the burdens borne by faculty and strengthen these vital learning opportunities for students.

Placements Abroad

Placements outside the country of the home institution bring additional challenges. First, students must adapt to cultural differences in their social and work lives, and thus it is best to encourage students to investigate these differences before departure. We recommend meeting with the student to discuss how to research, prepare for, and adapt to potentially different workplace norms. If possible, include a faculty or staff member familiar with that country in this meeting, or have them direct the student to credible sources for learning about workplace cultural differences. In many cases, the Study Abroad Office will have resources as well.

Second, any internship conducted in another country, whether in-person or virtually, independently or in conjunction with a course, should include a consultation with the appropriate home campus office about travel, health, resource access, safety, and security issues. For internships conducted abroad, the faculty supervisor should connect with their Study Abroad Office to ensure that the institution's international travel protocols are followed. Simply put, the home institution's Study Abroad Office is the best conduit for legal, security, housing, and health questions because these staff members have the expertise and background experience to navigate these issues. At TU, recent internships conducted abroad were found through the Study Abroad Office and became part of the students' summer away experience.

Students studying abroad almost invariably face employment challenges, given each country's rules and employment regulations regarding the hiring of foreigners, and many international public affairs opportunities remain out of reach for students. Unpaid internships connected with higher education institutions or obtained through personal connections can be an exception. When USC's American students have independently obtained internships in Europe, for example, they have gained these positions through close personal connections, usually working for US companies or contractors operating in Europe. Depending on the country, permissions for private employers may be more lax. This option can be quite valuable for students who desire to learn about different workplace cultures, norms, and policies because they seek careers in international business or in a public or private capacity that requires working in a foreign office.

Completing an internship for credit may also look different when done abroad. Towson's three students who recently interned away from the US were enrolled in a Study Abroad internship course with the INST faculty as the instructor of record, or in a Study Abroad placeholder course. The Study Abroad Office and the faculty member provided advising jointly via common meetings and email exchanges before students' departures; requirements throughout the semester were conducted via email. An obvious distinction lies in the ability of a supervisor to visit the site in-person, so in Towson's case, the INST faculty adviser engages in at least two phone meetings—an activity that occurs with all site supervisors, regardless of location. The first is a preliminary discussion to ensure that course requirements are understood by those working on site; the second is an in-person, mid-semester check-in with the student and a phone meeting with the site supervisor. If phone meetings cannot be arranged, email exchanges are conducted. Required weekly journals are designed to record a snapshot of how the student is doing that week, review major duties, and provide an opportunity for feedback. Students are told not to just list duties undertaken, but instead to focus on one or two key events or activities that week and what was learned or gained from that experience. The event could include what a student learned as a passive observer or as an active participant in the organization; either way, the student is expected to reflect on how that experience influenced them professionally or personally and submit responses via email. The INST faculty adviser replies to each journal entry, sometimes with professional advice and sometimes with needed encouragement. These exchanges with both the site supervisor and the student allow faculty to engage in regular conversations about how the internship is proceeding no matter where the internship is located and provides openings to discuss and bridge any problems, such as those stemming from differing cultural frames of reference.

Many schools, including USC, do not offer international internship placements—that is, experiences based outside the US—because students have to be enrolled in an on-campus course during the regular academic year in order to earn class credit. During the COVID-19 pandemic, USC temporarily allowed remote international internships to count for credit,¹⁷ but USC students typically pursue international internships on their own (i.e., not for credit) during the summer, and limited funding is available for a small number of global programs operated through the Department and the Career Center.¹⁸

There has been very little demand for a summer internship course at USC because fees and tuition are not typically included in financial aid packages. Even when they cannot earn credit, students who pursue internships abroad outside of school programs often seek assistance with securing placements.¹⁹ Those students should still be encouraged to seek advice from the Study Abroad Office to avoid or address unanticipated issues relating to working abroad as interns.

Information about Placement Opportunities

Related to the challenge of identifying locally available international internships is the issue of how students receive information about opportunities. A general and oft-mentioned problem is that across a campus there can be competing sources of information about internships, a situation that can create frustrations for students who must navigate certain rules about what is (or is not) an appropriate placement. This challenge increases for IR/IS students because typical sources such as the Career Center database, bulletin boards, online job posts, and a variety of university webpages will not necessarily highlight how the work fits into the academic context. Both TU and USC students often express dissatisfaction that there is not a “one-stop-shop” for all of their internship needs which, ideally, should be provided as close to their home department as possible. There is also a sense that students want their departments to give them “VIP access” to select opportunities so that they do not have to compete with other students for the same positions (Chávez Metoyer in this volume offers an additional perspective on this issue). Specifically, because they are enrolled in a course for which they pay tuition, some students expect the department to guarantee access to desirable opportunities. Both USC and TU have opted against this model in order to use the internship search process as a professional development learning experience for students, but having to sort through a wide array of options—including domestic internships that may or may not have international angles—understandably can lead to frustration. To alleviate this problem, two strategies are recommended. First, program websites could maintain an FAQ page that lists recommended steps and sources to consult in the internship search process. USC’s page, for example, suggests sources based on how far along students are in the search process and how experienced they are with job searches.²⁰ To those just starting their search, a visit to the career advisor is recommended, and if going abroad, to the Study Abroad Office; to those knowing what they want, databases are recommended instead (see supplemental resources for a list of international placements).

A second strategy is to advertise the course to students ahead of their potential enrollment in order to create lead time for them to identify desirable placements and also prime them to take action, preferably during the semester prior to enrolling in the internship course. This advertisement at USC is done in person through visits to courses, via postings to learning management systems (Blackboard, Moodle, Canvas) composed by faculty, and in targeted emails sent by departmental staff and academic advisors. Also, particularly if it is incorporated into their syllabus, faculty can promote and showcase students’ international internships in public forums—such as symposia, colloquia, posters, or campus conferences, for example—to spread knowledge about the international aspects of their local area. Arranging these presentations requires time and university resources, including faculty and staff commitments, but the benefits to students include teaching others about these contexts, providing examples of such opportunities, allowing prospective interns to ask questions of those who have completed internships, and, for faculty, sharing and learning about the experiences of local-global connections explored by others. Further, this option provides the university with an opportunity to showcase its global-local connections in the public and private sectors.

2. Assessment at Home and Abroad

While our experience shows that students value internships, the tools for assessing learning goals for internship programs are not uniform (Ediger 2010). Two separate types of assessment are worth considering: one, by students enrolled in an internship course, of how they assess the effectiveness of their learning experience; two, by faculty or the institution, as to whether students are meeting the learning objectives through the program (i.e., assessment of student learning). In the former case, we suspect that the challenges associated with internationally focused internships are not much different from those in other internship programs. In the latter case, we have encountered additional challenges, especially with internships conducted abroad. We discuss each in turn.

Student assessment of their learning experience is influenced by the perceived quality of the overall work experience. We know from Alpert (2009) that since internships are conducted off-campus and the work lies outside of the program coordinator's control, a student's experience, if not positive, diminishes their assessment of the overall benefit of the internship program. In practice this means that when students submit course evaluations, a negative internship experience can color their perception of the utility of the internship course that they took. In addition, at both institutions, students tend to complain about the workload associated with these classes, which only earn 2 units/credits at USC and earn a "normal" 3 credits at TU.²¹ Some students perceive work and commute hours as part of their coursework, while others begrudge assignments and meetings that require them to put in additional time. Faculty can help to shape students' expectations by addressing these issues from the outset and continuing to emphasize each stage of a course project and other assignments as essential work.

Second, students often fail to grasp the purpose of course assignments and approach requirements as boxes to be checked off, rather than as exercises designed to achieve specific learning outcomes. For example, most students do not implicitly understand the difference between a reflection essay (personal and professional development goals) and a traditional research paper (traditional knowledge and critical thinking goals), and sometimes blend these. This misunderstanding can lead to low quality in the research paper, and as a pass/fail graded class, the faculty member has few incentives for students to invest significant time in this assignment. A partial solution to this problem is to disallow courses taken for the major to be counted as pass/no pass, a strategy which USC, other majors at TU, and other institutions employ; another is to enlarge the audience for their work, such as requiring that students submit their final projects to their supervisors or present them to their peers.²²

We also know that both the student's assessment and the overall learning experience in the program are enhanced when the advisor takes a close interest in the student's research project in the course. A significant written project is a desirable assessment instrument from the perspective of all involved stakeholders, as documented by Alpert (2009), but our experience confirms that student learning is magnified when their individual research projects receive detailed feedback and support from the mentor. However, the potentially wide range of IR/IS internships poses a challenge for mentors because it requires them to evaluate substantively what students are taking on in their projects. This connection can be further complicated if students take private sector opportunities that have international dimensions.²³ As such, our experience suggests that it is important to identify faculty coordinators in IR who have broad interdisciplinary interests so that they are able to support and assess any one student's project.

Our respective programs emphasize the role of reflective assignments in accordance with the core principle of experiential education which says that "for knowledge to be discovered and internalized the learner must [...] weigh outcomes against past learning and future implications" (Bennion 2015, 356). We can and should insist on this type of assignment in IR/IS internship courses, particularly because of the navigation of cultures, political systems, and/or economic processes that usually occurs. However, we have far less control over the types of related assignments that are asked of students when the internship takes place abroad or outside of the home institution's regular internship course, which can impact the quality of assessments that are performed. Even when they are located in the US, international worksite supervisors may not understand American higher education needs, such as submitting timely evaluations or ensuring that the student does meaningful work, far beyond answering phones and filing paperwork. When the latter has occurred, the faculty member has contacted the worksite supervisor to discuss new assignments and discussed with the student how they might evaluate the cultural differences in workplaces that are leading to this outcome, such as gender-based expectations. When paperwork is late, then the faculty member must send gentle email reminders. In all cases, the faculty member needs to ensure that the student is not placed in the position of "making demands," or being seen as doing so, as in many cultures this positioning could negatively affect the student's situation and further treatment on site. Should problems persist, connecting with the Study Abroad Office may yield some helpful tips relative to that country. Often these kinds of problems can be avoided altogether when relying on the Study Abroad Office from the outset (in fact this is required on many campuses), because their office staff can work closely with the international institution's internship program to ensure that expectations are clear and that those providers who do not fulfill these expectations are excluded from future placements.

3. Pre-professional Support

Required pre-professional development exercises may be of limited utility to some and highly valuable to others, yet all students tend to prefer one-on-one advice, which can be difficult for an individual faculty member to accommodate. In the case of USC, some students perceive very little value in course assignments that involve attending a workshop or a career event on a topic such as business communication, crafting a résumé and writing a cover letter, networking, or salary negotiation because they are too general for their specific needs; these students prefer to use online resources and have someone check their individual résumés and cover letters. Others become dissatisfied when specific events or workshops do not line up with their schedules or are offered too early or too late in the semester. These challenges tend to be more common when programming is created and managed by entities outside the department, such as by a career center that serves an entire campus or college. On some campuses, however, a staff member can be recruited to address a specific class and offer a curated workshop.

We also know that one of the important aspects of internships is to reflect on how the hands-on experience translates into competencies, including abilities, skills, and knowledge (Biswas 2020; NACE 2021). Internship programs can adopt strategies practiced by Study Abroad programs to manage “unpacking sessions” designed to help students articulate and present their marketable skills and competencies in both the job-interview process and on résumés (Malerich 2009, 9). At USC, we have successfully organized a mandatory in-person meeting for the entire semester’s cohort to engage in a group exercise with amended résumés as a non-graded deliverable. Naturally, the time burden increases if professionalization workshops must be customized by the instructor or coordinator for the specific cohort each semester. Other ways to help students recognize and highlight international dimensions on their résumés include requiring students to construct and practice a three-minute “elevator speech” about themselves. Given that the international focus may not be clearly identifiable in the title of an internship placement, students often need to be shown how to extract experiences and skills that could be of importance to potential employers who value the IR/IS aspects of the work completed. Malerich (2009) warns that this problem is particularly challenging for IR/IS interns because it often remains unclear to employers which specific competencies were built through the internationally focused experience that could be relevant to a future position (8). Employers can also be quick to dismiss the link between an international working experience and the development of transferable soft skills such as inter-cultural competence, multicultural team building, and language proficiency. Having students reflect on their overall experience and then articulating, for potential employers, specific skills that were obtained through their internships often requires one-on-one attention from faculty or trained career counselors.

4. Costs and Financial Aid

A familiar challenge for all interns are the associated costs. These include direct costs such as tuition, transportation, opportunity costs of foregoing paid employment to do an internship, and indirect costs of room and board. Added costs of internships abroad typically include airfare, communication (cell-phone, remote internet connections), additional travel or health insurance, and possibly application and program fees associated with a study abroad program. Often overlooked is the cost of attire, as cultural expectations about proper work dress can differ from what the students expect. Students in large metropolitan areas with competitive rental markets may also have to pay for summer rent in order to “hold” an apartment to which they will return after a summer away. For most students, summer tuition is not covered by financial assistance, and so they avoid taking for-credit internships in the summer. Funding sources available at our respective institutions may cover airfare and a portion of room and board costs, but they are not sufficient to cover all of these additional expenses. As a result, for most students, the total costs are simply the main barrier for taking on an internship abroad. For them, taking a course may be the one way to associate financial aid with an internship opportunity.

Students who are better off socioeconomically are also then better positioned to take advantage of the kinds of international internships that we know advance their employment post-graduation. The costs of unpaid work abroad thus continue to be a barrier to participation and contribute to growing income inequality at home (McDonald 2016), particularly for students who have significant caregiving responsibilities.

The argument for student funding is made elsewhere in this volume, but we wish to emphasize our respective institutional concerns that funds be provided in a way that does not interfere or offset existing tuition support from financial aid, fellowships, and scholarships. In conjunction with a Development Office, other sources of aid might be developed by a program coordinator who maintains close relationships with employers; they could advocate for the creation of employer-based stipends, or consider ways to partner with employers to create new sources of outside funding for students who otherwise would be unable to do an internship. Universities should also make some scholarships available precisely for this purpose. Lastly, universities could investigate ways to reduce tuition costs for summer internships.

LESSONS LEARNED

One lesson learned at both institutions is that we can develop internationally focused internships at home by helping students make local-global connections and relying increasingly on the private sector to do so. For example, students have worked on projects for private firms that lobby foreign governments for tariff reductions in agricultural sectors, for music and entertainment companies that deal with trade-related intellectual property rights, and for startups looking to create new green technologies to alleviate poverty. These opportunities can provide a rich alternative to typical public affairs placements because businesses all over the US increasingly cooperate or compete with foreign partners. We find that our students are uniquely qualified to assist with internationally focused projects of private businesses because of their foreign affairs knowledge and growing research and data skills. These internships also offer an important international learning option for students whose travel status or family obligations may otherwise prohibit this international experience. Faculty can recruit employers by emphasizing students' abilities to assist with analysis of security threats, intellectual property protection, and labor and environmental standards, among others. Students' language and cultural competency skills can be an asset to businesses looking to expand their international connections and enhance their international communication regardless of their location in the US. Uncovering global-local connections is an approach that can be replicated in many university communities, by faculty members who reside far from large metropolitan areas, and in regions where locally based public affairs positions may not be readily available in government offices and policy think tanks. We have found that even employers without internationally focused assignments can help students develop on-the-job skills that can be linked to international relations or international studies with carefully selected, internationally focused research projects. IR/IS students can gain new insight into refugee and resettlement issues, asylum seeking, and immigration issues of concern locally; they can learn about the impacts of international aid, law, and international development and bring that knowledge back to their institutions through presentations and discussions—in their own courses, in recruitment workshops, or in a showcase of student work.

Both institutions covered in this chapter are in metropolitan areas with many options for in-person, internationally focused internships. Some of these internships were initially shut down during the pandemic, but in other cases, the pandemic compelled some organizations and companies to create virtual internships. New technologies and practices will continue to enable more of these positions, especially internationally, opening more opportunities to more students, including those at institutions in rural areas. Virtual IR/IS internships will create new challenges for colleges and universities in terms of vetting, managing, and supervising these opportunities but may also strengthen ties between the Study Abroad Office and an international studies/international relations program.

Another lesson that emerges from the analysis of challenges to internationally focused internships is that many proposed solutions require faculty to devote additional time and resources to ensure student and programmatic success. Whether faculty seek out, develop, and maintain ties to the private sector or work to expand placements abroad, we are suggesting that more responsibility would fall onto the faculty coordinator, as both local and global connections must be created and maintained. Also, by suggesting that faculty customize workshops for the pre-professional development of their interns or advocate for employer-based student stipends, we are asking faculty to step in and provide more administrative work that fills the gap between student learning and student professionalization. Yet faculty loads and fluctuating enrollment numbers do not reflect the level of commitment needed and expected of faculty in many situations.

The editors and other contributors to this volume argue for additional financial support to incentivize and support faculty in these roles.²⁴ Ultimately, faculty coordinators should be enabled to take on the highly individualized mentoring that a solid internship experience requires, and their work should be accounted for in tenure and promotion decisions. If higher education institutions are serious about an international education mission for all of their students and if political science as a discipline seeks to become more international, then more attention must first be paid to recognizing the efforts of faculty who cultivate and deliver meaningful learning opportunities through IR/IS internships.

CONCLUSION

International studies and international relations (IS/IR) internships provide benefits similar to other internships discussed throughout this book, including improving research, critical thinking, and writing skills, linking classroom knowledge to actual experiences, establishing connections that can lead to more internships and/or jobs postgraduation, and expanding students' abilities to work independently. Their unique benefits center on the international component, whereby students can apply and further their knowledge of current international affairs, including cultural, historical, economic, and political processes, structures, events, and alternative perspectives. As the world of work becomes increasingly globalized, we need to prepare students for the international contexts that await them upon graduation. Political science programs must be ready to extend these global learning opportunities to all International Relations/International Studies students who seek them, whether the positions are based in the US or abroad. When working within an interdisciplinary context, with supportive administrators, and with sufficient financial support, faculty can play essential roles in enriching international internships—efforts that can result in deeper understanding of the global-local connections that exist in every community.

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ENDNOTES

1. See for example USC IR learning objectives posted on their department webpage: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/sir/major-requirements/>. Towson University INST learning objectives are posted in the catalog online: <https://catalog.towson.edu/undergraduate/liberal-arts/international-studies/international-studies-ba/>.
2. This situation can help a student by increasing options, but (in some cases and places, such as large cities) it can also add confusion by providing seemingly unlimited options. However, if we return to the key component of IR/IS learning outcomes—an international dimension—this limiting variable can guide decisions about what does and does not count as an IR/IS internship.
3. In 2019, USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences merged the Political Science Department with SIR to form a joint Political Science and International Relations Department. Hence, the new department consists of two undergraduate programs, one in Political Science and one in International Relations. Each undergraduate program administers a separate internship program.
4. It was clear that students apply for and land internships outside of the school, but we thought that by offering a formal course for credit, we could attract a subset of students who are interested in incorporating internships into their academic learning and training.
5. Dornsife College at USC offers other for-credit internship courses that award university credit but not major credit. For a full list, see: https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/1078/docs/Do_it_Internship_Search_Guide.pdf.
6. Of those who did not have an internship, 52% said that they have not yet had a chance to do an internship, about 15% reported that they don't have time or resources, 27% don't know how to find one, and only 6% reported that they are not interested. This demonstrates that internships are highly popular among our students but also shows that our program is serving only a small segment of that population. The survey captured responses from 158 students participating in seven major courses during the early Fall 2020 semester.
7. Without detailed information about how many students have an internship per academic year, we cannot estimate the percentage of students served by the program.
8. We should note that while this type of resource may not exist on smaller campuses, software such as Handshake and People Grove that connects alumni to current students can help jumpstart one.
9. Towson University. 2021. "At a Glance." Towson University. Accessed May 4, 2021. <https://towson.edu/about/ata glance/>.
10. Towson University. 2020. "Major in International Studies." In *Undergraduate Catalog 2020-21*, Towson University. <https://catalog.towson.edu/undergraduate/liberal-arts/international-studies/international-studies-ba/>.
11. Not all majors at TU require a practicum or capstone experience.
12. Additionally, some INST majors embarked on internships through other departments such as political science and business, and with the INST director's approval, these credits can be used to fulfill the practicum requirement. This option of overlapping credit helps students who are pursuing double majors or minors.
13. The placements in Annapolis, normally reserved for American students focusing on state and local government, were undertaken by international students at TU seeking to learn about another country's political system (in this case, the US). The three study abroad internships were conducted in Ireland, the United Kingdom, and a multi-country program in Asia.
14. The Washington Center partnered with the state of Maryland to offer scholarships for in-state students, now totaling \$9,000/semester, which recently has increased enrollment through the Center. See: <https://twc.edu/programs/state-scholarships>.

15. The State Department, at least, has offered online internships since 2009. See: <https://www.state.gov/vsfs-a-great-opportunity-for-students-and-federal-employees-alike/>.
16. Specifically, the research project allowed the student to study whether environmental sustainability efforts are more effective when conducted in response to a push from state, sub-state, or non-state actors.
17. The experience with remote teaching and internships has demonstrated that it would be possible for our existing program structure to accommodate internships that our students line up abroad. While the practical experience would be “in person,” the academic work would be performed remotely with the faculty instructor “at home.” However, we think that few students would pursue this opportunity due to lack of summer tuition funding. Towson students face similar funding challenges, and hence few have pursued this option.
18. The USC Political Science and International Relations Department offers separate internship opportunities in the summer through the Brussels Program for students interested in European security and foreign policy. We offer scholarships to students pursuing internships in Africa and Asia that they have identified on their own. The USC Office for Overseas Studies runs programs in Paris, Australia, Hong Kong, and Mexico City. A popular program offered by the USC Career Center is the USC Global Fellows program, and our IR students are frequent recipients of this fully funded internship opportunity abroad. With political science students, IR students are very competitive for the Rangel International Affairs Summer Enrichment Program. Many also tend to find opportunities while studying abroad. Others turn to federal government opportunities in the CIA, FBI, GAO, OMB such as the Pathways Internship Program and the State Department Student Experience Program, as well as the centralized intern program in the Defense Department. Popular international organizations are major DC think tanks and the Clinton Foundation, Carnegie, OECD, Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the Gates Foundation.
19. Depending on the country, permissions for private employers may be more lax. These issues amplify the need to cultivate more opportunities with private sector actors who may have the resources to navigate employment law regulations and who may enable students to work both at home and abroad. These issues highlight, once again, the importance of working with and going through the Study Abroad Office to overcome these hurdles.
20. See, for example: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/sir/internship-program-faqs/>.
21. A “normal” IR course at USC carries 4 units/credits.
22. During the COVID-induced switch to remote learning, this rule was relaxed to allow a limited number of courses to be taken pass/no pass in select semesters. This accommodation will be lifted once the campus returns to residential learning.
23. Narayanan, Olk, and Fukami (2010) propose a strategy for screening students to ensure that their interests overlap with the faculty member’s research interests and expertise, but this strategy is not feasible in small programs where there is a single faculty coordinator (and a smaller faculty that students can access for additional help).
24. The conclusion to this book contains an extended argument for paying interns and compensating faculty fairly and adequately for their work. We would like to add that there are numerous institutional benefits to providing a clearer workload credit and accounting for expectations for faculty. First, faculty whose expertise focuses only on local or national politics may not be able to help students navigate the international questions and expectations of these internships. A specialized faculty internship coordinator could resolve this problem. Second, clearer expectations and compensation levels could also help institutions to recruit and retain a dedicated faculty coordinator who could create and maintain close relationships with local entities. The benefits for students, faculty, and staff, include creating less burdensome and more helpful major-specific training sessions with institutional career centers, thus making landing these internships a smoother and more successful process for students.