

UTM Undergraduate Students: Tips on Finding & Securing Your Own Placement

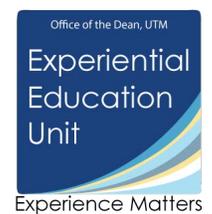
Applies to:

Academic Internships

Practica

Work-Integrated Learning

Community Engaged Service Learning



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Introduction

This document is intended to assist UTM Undergraduate Students in the planning and preparation for finding and securing their own placement as part of an academic course.

Congratulations! You have been accepted into or are participating in an Academic Internship, Practica, Work-Integrated Learning course or Community Engaged Service Learning course here at UTM. In some instances these types of opportunities have the added benefit of allowing students to manage the solicitation and securement of their own placement outside of the university with a local organization.

If you are required to find and secure your own placement, don't panic! In addition to a number of resources available to you on campus, including your Course Director, this document will assist in outlining the details in identifying and obtaining a placement.

How to Search For Organizations

Finding an external (or sometimes internal) placement site and supervisor can sound like a scary and daunting task. With some preparation and determination this can be easily accomplished, starting with the search for a suitable organization.

In some cases your Course Director will have provided you with guidelines on which organizations you should focus on, this can range from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), to not-for-profits and everything in between.

Your main goals when thinking about which organizations to consider are:

1. How Does This Organization Relate Back To The Course/Program?

This is an important aspect, you want to select an organization that would benefit from all of the work you have been doing up until now, and you want to select an organization which relates to the course/program materials and your potential project.

2. Do I Need to Come Up With A Project?

In most cases the placement supervisor will have a project or specific duties in mind. This is quite normal. Your Course Director is responsible for ensuring that the assigned duties within your project/placement are suitable and appropriate, which is based on the organization's needs.

It is important that you do not presume that an organization is seeking input on a project or assigned duties. There may be cases in which you are asked to come up with a project in consultation with your placement supervisor and Course Director and this is appropriate. Your Course Director will again ensure that all assigned tasks are suitable.

If you have an idea for a project, or are inspired to create one based on the organizations' goals and what you have learned in your course to this point, you should speak with your Course Director about the potential project **BEFORE** proposing it to the organization.

3. How Does This Organization Relate Back To My Personal Interests?

Another very important item to consider is how the organization may relate to your personal interests. Many students opt for some of the more obvious organizations, and there is nothing wrong with this, but there are many organizations out there, which can fulfil the course/program material while aligning with your personal interests and further developing your skills. This is something to keep in mind when you begin your search for potential organizations.

4. Where Do I Begin My Search?

After you have considered the course/program material, what your potential project might be, and how some of your personal interests might be of benefit, you can begin your search. In some cases your Course Director may have provided you with a list of partners or potential organizations which is a good place to start.

If you were asked to research organizations on your own, Google is a great place to begin your search. Additionally, the Experiential Education Unit (EEU) can assist by helping to narrow down your search as well. The UTM Career Centre has resources available (such as the Career Learning Network (CLN)) and materials broken down by program which can be another good place to start.

Begin by looking for local organizations within the Region of Peel, GTA, or where you are able to travel to and from, at least once per week for the duration of the course. You want to look for organizations that fit a general description of activities that you may be working on presently, that reflect a general interest and an organization that you would like to work with. A good place to start your search within the Region is the *Community Information Partners Peel* database for an overview of what exists:

<https://peel.cioc.ca/>.

5. Research, Research, Research

Research the organizations **BEFORE** you reach out to them. This is an extremely important step in the process. You want to be sure that you are knowledgeable about the organizations when you discuss them with your Course Director; this will also help to prepare you when you initiate contact and with the interview process.

The UTM Career Centre has a handy tip sheet available on [Company Research](#) which is another great resource to utilize.

6. Are There Things I Need To Look Out For?

When searching for potential placement sites you'll want to look out for:

- Whether the organization is reputable
- How long has the organization been around
- How many employees do they have
- Is there more than one location
- What they do/are known for
- Read the mission statement - does it reflect your values
- Read the "About Us" or "Who We Are" pages to get a better sense of the organization
- See if you can find testimonials
- Have they worked with other organizations? Are they partnered with them?
- Do they have existing programming in place? If so, what is it and can it apply/relate?

Expanding your search and knowledge of the potential organization will prepare you for your discussion with the Course Director; you approach the organization and your interview. Initial research into the organization will prove to be quite beneficial in the long run, so it would be wise not to skip this step!

7. How Many Organizations Do I Need To Look For?

You will only be placed with one organization, but you shouldn't limit your search to just one. It is good practice to look for a minimum of 3, but be prepared to look for additional organizations in the event that your Course Director isn't satisfied with your selection or if you end up exhausting your list.

There is the potential that the organization you reach out to might not be able to accept an intern or volunteer for any number of reasons. When this happens you will need to move down your list. Don't feel badly if you are not able to get your first, second or third choice, there is an organization out there for you; all you have to do is find it!

You've Identified Potential Organizations...What's Next?

You completed your search and found some organizations that you believe will be a good fit. What do you do next?

Prior to initiating contact with any potential organization/placement site it is critical that you prepare information about the site. It will not only prepare you for your initial communication with the site, but will also provide valuable information for your Course Director. Prepare the following details:

- The physical placement site (office building, lab, etc.)
- Your potential supervisor (if known) – **NOTE:** Do not reach out to the organizations at this point
- The location
- What the organization/placement site does
- How long they have been around
- What potential projects you could see yourself working on – **NOTE:** you may not be asked for this as the supervisor could have projects/tasks already in mind
- How this relates back to the course/program, and
- Why you are interested in potentially being placed there

How Do I Find Contacts? And Who Do I Contact At The Organization?

Some, but not all organizations will list internal contacts on their websites. If they do, it is important for you to recognize the titles and positions of the employees for example, Administrative Assistant, Assistant to the President, Human Resources Generalist, etc. Titles and positions vary from organization to organization so it is a good idea to familiarize yourself with what the differences are in various positions, and what they mean to the organization.

Once you have identified the titles and positions of the employees, your next step is to determine the hierarchy within the organization. This can be tricky depending on how many employees there are. You want to make sure that when you do reach out that

you are contacting the appropriate individual. Sometimes this is not as clear as we would like it to be so you can always preface your conversation/email with something like: "If you are not the appropriate person to contact with this inquiry, I apologize and ask that you please forward my message to the appropriate individual".

Contacts

If the organization does not list internal contacts on their website and instead they have a general email or phone details you have a couple of options when reaching out:

1. You can send your message to the general email account, or
2. Contact the general phone number to inquire about whom you can speak with

See pages 9-12 for more details on reaching out.

In rare cases, the president or head of the organization is the person whom you will be corresponding, but you don't want to make this assumption right away. Remember, the president or head of the organization is a very busy person so it would be wise to reach out to their assistant (if they have one) first. **NOTE:** this should not be the first place you go to when initiating contact as there may be individuals within the organization you need to connect with first.

In other cases, there are specific and specialized personnel who are responsible for volunteers or interns and it is entirely appropriate to reach out to these individuals directly. Alternatively, you may find with larger organizations that Human Resources personnel are the appropriate contacts. Researching the contacts in the organization and their positions will assist you when deciding whom to contact.

If you are unsure, and it is not clear who the appropriate person is, you are certainly welcome to contact the main reception for the organization to inquire who would be the appropriate contact within the organization to reach out to concerning a potential student internship or student volunteer placement. Many times these wonderful people can direct you straight to the source!

Reaching Out

You've identified organizations, you have a list of contacts and you need to begin reaching out. But where do you start and what do you do?

Begin by creating an action plan. Be well prepared before you begin to reach out. Without advance preparation you can run the risk of appearing unprofessional. You took the time to get to this point by having investigated and researched the organizations, so take some additional time to prepare yourself for the initial contact. Remember, you are a representative of the course and UTM so you want to make a good first impression!

Sample Action Plan:

- Update Resume and Cover Letter
 - Visit Career Center to book a Cover Letter and Resume Critique/Workshop
- Create/update brief personal biography/statement
- Identify applicable courses that might be relevant to the organization
- Write down a script for cold calling the organization
- Draft a sample email message for the organization
- Etc.

There are a number of different methods for reaching out, and on occasion you may need to utilize more than one, but the standards are email, phone call (cold calling), or in-person/drop-ins.

Email

If your initial contact with the organization is through email ensure you have crafted a well thought out and professional email that includes the following points:

- The reason you are writing to the organization
- A brief personal statement/biography
- Applicable courses and grades
- What the course is about
- Why you think the organization would benefit from having you intern/volunteer

The email should be clear and have no spelling or grammatical errors! Proofread it multiple times before sending, and have others review if necessary.

Phone (Cold Calls)

If your initial contact with the organization is by telephone (cold calling) ensure that you have crafted a well thought out and professional speaking script that includes:

- The reason for your call
- What the course is about
- A brief personal statement/biography
- Why you think the organization would benefit from having you intern/volunteer
- Applicable courses and grades

The UTM Career Centre has a handy tip sheet available on [Cold Calling](#) which is another great resource to utilize.

In-Person/Drop-In

Organizations may not accept drop-ins, so you should contact the main reception by telephone in advance to inquire if this is an acceptable practice. Typically, students contact organizations by email and telephone prior to any in-person contact. However, if your initial contact with the organization is in-person by drop-in, ensure you have with you a copy of your updated Cover Letter and Resume, any necessary application forms completed in advance (if possible), and you have thought out in advance what you might say:

- Consider the reason for your being there
- Discuss the course/program and its relevance to the organization
- Speak with them about you, and why you believe they would benefit from having you intern/volunteer
- Consider discussing any applicable courses and grades
- Be prepared for typical interview questions that may emerge from an in-person conversation as this might occur, see page 13 for more information on interviews.

You may not be able to get all this information out through an initial drop-in, so don't be discouraged if they take your Cover Letter and Resume and let you know that they will

be in touch. In-person meetings are typically at the interview stage of the process, so you may have another opportunity if you are selected for an interview.

Professional Tips:

- Avoid inappropriate language and “text” speak when composing messages
- Avoid “slang” when speaking on the phone or in person
- Ensure you address the recipient as Mr. or Ms. or Dr. (if you are sure the person is a Doctor); DO NOT address women as “Mrs.”
- Remember to thank them person for their time and consideration
- Use an appropriate closing salutation such as “Best” or “Sincerely”, etc. when composing a message
- Be sure to include your contact information such as your U of T email address ONLY, along with your cell phone and home phone number
- Update your outgoing voicemail message to one that is professional and includes your name
 - If the recipient decides to call instead of responding by email, you will leave a good impression if you are unable to answer the call when it comes in
- If you receive an email response, it should be answered right away and within a couple of days at the latest
 - Be sure to have a polite tone in your message
 - Thank them again, *even if you are not successful*
 - If you are successful, proceed with the directions they provide to you

Note: In some cases (not all) a template or suggestions to follow may have been provided to you and it is important that you work with those.

If you are unsure about anything, your Course Director, the Career Centre or the EEU can also assist in helping you to prepare a professional outgoing email message, speaking script or to prepare for an informal drop-in. Feel free to make an appointment to discuss further with any of these resources before sending out any email messages, making phone calls or in advance of an interview.

Interview Time

All your hard work has paid off and you've made it to the interview stage. The organization has accepted your initial proposal to work with them and now they want to meet you in person to see if you are indeed the right fit.

A very handy tool for you is the *Internships and You: How to Succeed in the Workplace* video workshop created by the UTM Experiential Education Unit (EEU). You can find the video through the EEUs YouTube channel (https://youtu.be/b_T4j0tcseM) or by visiting the EEUs website at: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/experience/students/tips-students>.

There are a number of handy tips and tricks available to you in this video and we recommend that you take advantage of this resource to help prepare you on your interview. There is a supplemental handout for UTM Undergraduate students which you can find along with the video on the EEUs website.

During the interview you may be asked what the responsibilities of the placement site/organization/supervisor will be, such as reporting, grading, etc. Discuss with your Course Director before going on interview as to what the responsibilities of the placement site/organization/supervisor will be so you are well prepared if asked this question.

Good Luck!

NOTE: If you are selected by the organization, you are required to let your Course Director know right away and submit all relevant details relating to the placement. It is critical at this point that your Course Director get in touch with your placement supervisor to begin working out the details of your project and their partnership with the course and UTM so be sure to provide your Course Director with the name and contact details for your placement supervisor.

What To Do If You Are Accepted For Placement Without Interviewing

This is not common practice however, if you were selected by the organization without having received a formal interview you are required to let your Course Director know right away and submit all relevant details relating to the placement. As well, it is critical at this point that your Course Director get in touch with your placement supervisor to begin working out the details of your project and their partnership with the course and UTM, so be sure to provide your Course Director with the name and contact details for your placement supervisor.

What If The Interview Didn't Work Out?

You had the best intentions and so did the organization, but for some reason it didn't work out and the organization decided to go in another direction. That's okay! You have a back-up list of other organizations that you prepared. Go back through the initial steps in the guide to help you re-focus, dust yourself off, and get back out there.

Remember: Professionalism, appropriate responses, and being polite are key to a successful interview. Use the tips provided in this document and in the *Internships and You: How to Succeed in the Workplace* video workshop to assist you on your interviews.

What If I Want To Change My Placement?

With the amount of work and time it took in finding and securing your placement, the decision to want to be removed should not come lightly. There are a number of questions that need to be considered first, such as:

- Why am I feeling this way?
- Have I discussed how I'm feeling with my supervisor, my Course Director, or the EEO?
- What is it about the placement that I am not enjoying?
- How might this impact my standing in the course/program?
- How will this impact the course/program as a whole?
- How will this impact UTM overall?

In some cases, students can feel as though the project/tasks that have been assigned are not what they expected. If this is how you are feeling, it is recommended that you discuss with your placement supervisor the project/tasks that you have been asked to complete in a courteous and professional manner. Many times this conversation alone can clear up any misconceptions you may have.

There may also be opportunities to discuss a re-direction of your project/tasks if you believe that changes/suggestions can be made. It is natural to feel apprehensive about approaching your placement supervisor to discuss making changes, but having this conversation can help with clearing up the tasks involved, and your feelings toward the project.

Removal from a placement site/organization can have a long-term impact on the course/program and UTM as a whole. So it is critical that you evaluate what you are feeling and to have preliminary discussions with your placement supervisor, Course Director or EEO.

Remember, your supervisor is invested in ensuring that you both have a valuable experience. It is important that you do not discredit your placement site/organization & supervisor because of how you are feeling.

Extenuating Circumstances

If there are extenuating circumstances surrounding your placement or an urgent personal situation that arises, you must speak with your Course Director immediately to discuss those circumstances and to determine the appropriate course of action.

Additional Assistance Available

If you:

- Are struggling to find organizations
- Feel a bit lost
- Don't know where to start
- Are not able to secure a placement

Don't worry! There are available resources and individuals here at UTM who can assist!

- Your Course Director
 - A terrific place to start! Your Course Director is experienced and has a network of contacts and can help you find some new ones too!
- UTM Experiential Education Unit (EEU)
 - We are a great resource on campus. We have worked with the external community and various partners over the years and can help you find a good fit. Arrange to meet with us and we can help get you on the right track! Visit us at: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/experience/> for more information.
- UTM Career Centre
 - If you are still feeling a bit lost or out of sorts, the UTM Career Centre is another great resource on campus. They can help you figure out the right fit and how to get to where you need to be. They offer workshops and one-on-one meetings and have a number of terrific resources available on their website: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/careers/>. Be sure to take full advantage of all the wonderful resources they have available to you!