Editorial Internships: Opportunities for All to Benefit

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Katie Duelm completed an unpaid 4-month internship at the journal Emerging and Infectious Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention before commencing full-time employment. Her duties as intern involved transcription of podcasts, XML file conversion, editing of tables and charts and short manuscripts, and figure vetting. Her presentation posed three questions: why become an intern, where to intern, and where to find an internship. Her own internship was unadvertised; Duelm advises would-be interns to contact publishers with whom they would like to work, ask their advisers for suggestions, and submit applications early (especially for government entities). A potential intern should be able to speak and write clearly, behave tactfully and professionally, and be willing to ask questions and seek feedback. The hands-on experience provided by an internship may be a better introduction to a given career than academe and may help the intern to determine his or her career path.

In overseeing the student internship program in the Department of Scientific Publications of the MD Anderson Cancer Center, Diane Hackett seeks candidates who have solid grammar and mechanics skills, an interest in science, and a willingness to consider a career in scientific editing. Intern applicants are evaluated through grammar–mechanics and proofreading tests and a personal interview. New hires attend a daylong institutional orientation and a department orientation. A full-time work schedule is desired during the summer semester and encouraged during the school year; interns are paid $14–15 per hour. Assignments include manuscript formatting and editing, including manuscript formatting and editing. Interns work closely with editors and receive continual feedback; as their skills improve, they are assigned projects with progressively higher levels of editing. On the plus side, well-trained interns can take over some tasks, some interns may be good candidates for future employment, and teaching interns is generally enjoyable. On the minus side, editors must continually monitor intern workload and offer guidance, which can be time consuming, and may be frustrated if interns are unmotivated or uncommunicative. It is crucial for interns to ask questions and be forthright, especially during the interview.

After the presentations, the moderator solicited questions from the audience. One listener asked about the typical length of internships (answer: usually one to three semesters), and a discussion about feedback and training ensued.

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This session addressed editorial internships from the points of view of a former intern, an editor who oversees a student internship program, and a senior medical writer who supervises an internship program. Each views editorial internships as beneficial to both intern and host and as a useful way of introducing young people to scientific editing as a career.

Barbara Gastel noted having benefited from internship-like experiences during her own education. Since then, she has placed many students and trainees in internships. She also mentioned having supervised many interns when she was editor of CSE’s Science Editor.

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