

Internships for Students with Disabilities

The information in this section is for students with a documented disability for whom the Americans with Disabilities Act may apply. These resources provide general information for those students as they prepare to pursue an internship as part of their educational program.

An individual with a disability is someone who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits a major life activity; has a record or history of such an impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment.

It is unlawful to discriminate against someone solely because of his/her association with an individual with a disability. Polk State College is committed to and encourages equal opportunity/equity/access for its programs, services and activities.

For Students with Disabilities:

- **Office of Disability Services:** Register with Disability Services on campus and speak with the Coordinator for Disability Services or one of the Student Success Counselors about campus resources and options for work-based learning/internships. Though it is not the responsibility of Coordinator of Disability Services to find you an internship, she can often be a good place to start for information.
- **Career Services and Internships:** If you are still determining what field is right for you, contact one of the Career Services Coordinators within Student Services, and she can assist you in finding a career that's right for you.
If you're ready to pursue an internship, contact the Internship Coordinator, who can assist you in connecting with employers in your field of study. Visiting polk.edu/interns for more information about getting started with an internship.
- **Document your disability needs:** Let the Coordinator of Disability Services and Internship Coordinator know what accommodations you might need to effectively perform in a work setting early on before you are placed in an internship so that ample time can be made to complete any required testing to document the need and to make arrangements. If you are unsure as to what accommodations you might need, work with Coordinator of Disability Services to schedule any needed assessments and to identify what accommodations would best suit your particular disability.
- **Consider transportation needs:** It is your responsibility, not the responsibility of Polk State staff or the employer to get you to your internship site. When selecting an internship, evaluate whether or not transportation will be a problem, find out what arrangements can be made, and discuss your needs with your Internship Coordinator so that he/she is aware of the situation and can help you find the most appropriate job match.

- **Be your own best advocate:** Once you start an internship, keep the Internship Coordinator and on-site supervisor informed of your progress and if you have any learning or functioning needs that are not being met. If an accommodation isn't working and/or if you need a different accommodation, be sure to keep all parties informed as you go rather than waiting until after the internship is over to voice your concerns.
- **Know your rights and responsibilities:** Be aware of the legal implications of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and what workplace accommodations you are entitled to under the law. If you do not self-identify and present current documentation of your disability, you might not be eligible to receive accommodations. Consult your institution's Coordinator of Disability Services office to obtain more information.

For Employers:

- **Connect with Polk State:** Work with the Internship Coordinator and disability service providers to promote internship opportunities to students with disabilities, and to learn more about how you can provide ADA compliant opportunities for student interns.
- **Be flexible and collaborative:** The workforce is changing. Some of the best employees are those that you may have made adjustments or accommodations for as a result of a disability. Sometimes what may be needed is small: lighting, seating, workspace arrangements, computer adaptations, etc., but it makes all the difference for the employee/intern who needs it.
- **Know your rights and responsibilities:** Take a closer look to assure that you understand the law and provide appropriate accommodations for individuals with disabilities. If you have questions or concerns, seek consultation on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Disability Support Services, Academic Affairs offices, Internship Coordinators, and academic advisors/departments might be able to address your concerns.
- **Train your staff:** Assure that you proactively and accurately inform your staff on diversity and disability awareness so that on-site supervisors and co-workers are informed and supportive.

Key steps within Internship Planning Process

Obtain a suitable Internship Placement

- The above information can assist you in preparing and planning for an internship experience that meets your needs and requirements.
- Work with the appropriate Polk State staff to assure that your needs will be met and provide ample time for any related assessments, documentation, or internship development.
- Consider ways to increase your experience prior to seeking an internship, such as: volunteering, workplace observing/professional shadowing, and/or working with a Career Mentor.
- Plan ahead to assure that you have plenty of time to secure an appropriate internship.

Student Objectives for the Internship

It will be important to develop an Internship Learning Plan with the assistance of staff from the Office of Disability Services as well as the Internship Coordinator and placement site supervisor to assure that the intern's needs and educational requirements are met during the internship. Students may also have assignments and/or goals from the practicum class (if applicable) to complete during the internship experience. Suggested targets include:

- Develop and use a variety of skills needed by competent entry-level workers in the area of specialization in which the internship is completed.
- Exhibit positive attitudes and work cooperatively with supervisors and co-workers/employees.
- Identify areas in which additional knowledge and/or skills are needed to perform competently in entry-level jobs.
- Set goals and objectives for improving and/or developing and gaining additional knowledge.

Career Development and Documentation:

- Students will work with the Internship Coordinator or Career Services Coordinator to develop a resume, in order to contact the employer and obtain employment.
 - Students will work with the Internship Coordinator or Career Services Coordinator to develop and practice interview skills prior to interviewing for the internship.
 - Complete any necessary background checks as may be required for all employees prior to beginning the internship.
 - Sign the Memorandum of Understanding prior to starting the internship. This document can be amended to include any needed accommodations as part of the agreement if necessary.
 - Develop an Internship Learning Plan in collaboration with practicum faculty, the Coordinator for Disability Services, and the Internship Coordinator, as appropriate.
 - Discuss the learning plan with the internship supervisor and add or adjust it as needed for the setting and the project/work assignments.
 - Meet as needed or desired with any/all involved staff from Polk State and the internship site in order to discuss and/or adjust internship or work plans in accordance with needed accommodations.
 - Complete projects and work assignments as directed and use the support system as needed.
 - Track internship hours and log reflections on experiences and the learning that took place.
 - Complete an evaluation of work experience.
 - Submit all final paperwork to the internship site, practicum instructor (if applicable), and Internship Coordinator.
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Polk State Disability Services:

The Disability Services Advisor works with any rehabilitation agency, such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation or the Division of Blind Services, to coordinate student services for students with disabilities. Designated parking spaces are available for students with disabilities who hold state-approved permits; additional parking permits are not required.

Students are encouraged to contact a Disability Services Advisor to request special accommodations or auxiliary aids. All information provided is voluntary and kept strictly confidential. If you have additional questions, please contact the Associate Dean of Student Services at either campus: 669-2305 (on the Winter Haven campus) or 669-2823 (on the Lakeland campus) and/or the following Polk State staff:

Melissa Futia, Coordinator of Disability Services: mfutia@polk.edu, 863.297.1010 ext. 5246

Mary Westgate, Coordinator of Special Services for students (WH): mwestgate@polk.edu, 863.292.3758, WAD 179

Simmi Johnson, Coordinator of Career Testing and Special Services (LKLD): sjohnson@polk.edu, 863.669.2822, LTB 1286.

Cate Igo, Academic Success Counselor (WH), cigo@polk.edu, 863.292.3759, WAD 178

Kim Pearsall, Academic Success Counselor (LKLD), kpearsal@polk.edu, 863.669.2309, LTB 1273

Pairris Jones, Career Service Coordinator (LKLD), pmjones@polk.edu, 863.297.1010 ext. 6121

Jennifer Schneider, Career Service Coordinator (WH), jschneider@polk.edu, 863.292.3687, WAD 184

Lynn Chisholm, Internship Coordinator, lchisholm@polk.edu, 863.298.6897, WFA 147c/LTB 1272

Additional Resources:

Disability.gov: <https://www.disability.gov/resource/internships-the-on-ramp-to-employment-a-guide-for-students-with-disabilities/>

Vocational Rehabilitation: <http://www.rehabworks.org/>

ADA: <http://www.circuit5.org/c5/programs-services/americans-with-disabilities-ada-services/>

ADA Resources: <http://www.adaresources.org/>

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