

# Virtual Internships

A Guide for Employers





**GAMMA IOTA SIGMA**

*The Insurance Industry's Premier Collegiate Talent Pipeline*

Employers,

The insurance industry is resilient, adaptable, and innovative. We have the ability to pivot and push forward even during difficult times. As summer approaches and uncertainty looms regarding the state of the workforce, we ask you to maintain your commitment to host Gamma Iota Sigma student members – who remain committed to careers in our industry – as interns within your organization. Their careers, your future workforce, and the continued sustainability of our industry depend on it.

We continually espouse – and our [Annual Student Recruiting Survey data](#) consistently touts – the value of face to face engagement, whether to establish relationships, maximize your marketing efforts and brand awareness, or demonstrate your company's unique culture to your prospective interns and hires. However, given the modifications demanded by the current climate, the enclosed resources for creating and facilitating a virtual internship program will allow you to deliver an effective and valuable virtual experience for your interns and continue to invest in the future of talent for your organization.

Gamma Iota Sigma is proud to be nimble, resilient, and a continued resource to both students and the industry during these unprecedented times. Thank you for your continued partnership and commitment to developing the talent pipeline of future leaders for our industry.

All the best,

Gamma Iota Sigma Team



## **Benefits of a Virtual Internship for Employers**

- Honor your commitment to hosting interns despite current events
- Engage the next generation of talent for your firm
- Help interns develop valuable skills and experience that would reduce training and onboarding time if hired in a full-time capacity later
- Leverage an expanded talent pool to hire candidates that best fit your organization's needs and opportunities
- Circumvent geographic restrictions that might otherwise limit your candidate pool
- Recognize increased flexibility in internship schedules, whether full-time, part-time, during the summer, school year, or year-round
- Take advantage of readily available support for busy seasons and/or ad-hoc projects
- Minimize space and equipment expenses as a result of the remote-work arrangement
- Eliminate intern housing and relocation expenses
- Continue to build employer on-campus brand
- Invest in the future of talent



## Preparing for the Internship

- **Choose an online collaboration tool**

A virtual communication tool is imperative to the success of a virtual internship. Many organizations already have a platform that allows virtual meeting capabilities. If your organization does not have this capability, Forbes' [list of remote working tools and technologies](#) can help you get started.

- **Designate internship point-persons**

A virtual intern needs a strong support system within your organization. The following are important roles in an internship experience:

- **Internship supervisor.** Responsible for managing the day-to-day tasks and performance of the intern.
- **Internship coordinator.** Responsible for internship logistics and program oversight, connecting interns across departments when applicable, and guiding interns through the overall internship experiences. If your organization does not have a designated employee or team within Human Resources to oversee interns, consider this a development opportunity for a rising star within your organization or a current employee who started with your company as an intern.
- **Intern mentor.** Responsible for providing general career guidance, motivation, and role modeling for the intern. The mentor could be an intern's supervisor, or another individual within the organization.

- **Develop an internship syllabus**

Create an internship outline that provides structure and sets expectations for the virtual internship. Include defined learning goals and a general schedule of tasks and responsibilities. [See our sample syllabus.](#)

- **Create a personalized training plan**

Prioritize training before the intern begins. What will the intern need, or need to know, in order to be successful on their team or in their role? Who will train the intern? Consider creating a checklist with clear steps and guidance for the training process.

- **Compile essential internship information into an easy-to-navigate guide**

Include:

- **Contact information.** Include contact details for the intern's supervisor, coordinator, mentor, and other individuals with whom they may interact during the internship (ex. Human Resources, IT).
- **Instructions for the intern's first day.** How will they log in to the company's systems? What is the first day schedule? Include clear instructions to facilitate a successful first day.



## **GAMMA IOTA SIGMA**

*The Insurance Industry's Premier Collegiate Talent Pipeline*

- **Links to corporate documents.** Resources such as your organization's employee handbook, organization chart, corporate video, and 10K can give the intern an understanding of the organization, its culture, and its policies without physically being in your company's work environment.
  
- **Confirm technology and access**  
Keep in mind students come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and opportunities and may not have the technological tools needed for a virtual internship. Ensure the intern has the necessary technology and support prior to the start of the internship, and provide a loaner laptop, internet card, webcam, and/or other equipment if needed. Additionally, ensure the intern is granted access to all necessary systems prior to their start date.



## Keys to a Successful Internship

- **Facilitate a robust onboarding and orientation**

Day 1 will set the tone for the rest of the virtual internship. The intern should have onboarding time scheduled with the internship coordinator and/or Human Resources representative the first day. In addition, consider the following to make the intern feel welcome:

- **A virtual team lunch.** Invite team members join a video conference call to meet the intern over lunch.
- **Intern meet-and-greet.** Facilitate virtual introductions and icebreakers with other interns within the organization, division, or team.
- **Welcome from leaders.** Ask your senior executives to record a brief, personalized video welcoming interns and offering advice for a success as they embark on their internship journeys.

- **Build organizational commitment**

It is important to engage your intern, build their commitment to your organization, and prevent the risk of isolation that sometimes results from remote work.

- **Send a welcome packet.** Items like a company-branded t-shirt, notebook, pen, and career fair giveaways can be an inexpensive and impactful way to make the intern feel like part of the team. Send the intern a welcome packet to arrive before or at the beginning of the internship. Consider including a hand-written welcome note from the intern's supervisor, coordinator, or mentor.
- **Organization involvement.** Provide the intern with a list of organizational opportunities, such as Employee Resource Groups, community service initiatives, or virtual learning, and encourage them to get involved in those that align with their interests.
- **Employee distribution lists.** Ensure the intern is included on company and departmental distribution lists so they are aware of important organizational news and events.
- **Consider an office visit.** If circumstances permit, consider bringing the virtual intern into the office for an in-person visit before or during their internship.

- **Facilitate ongoing communication and feedback**

Ongoing, proactive communication between the intern and their manager, coordinator, and mentor is key to a successful virtual internship.

- **Plan regular check-ins.** Check-ins can be a 15-minute catch-up meeting every morning, or a 1-hour meeting with an agenda once-per-week. Select a schedule that works best for your organization and stick to it.
- **Establish preferred channels of communication.** Specify the best way(s) for the intern to contact their supervisor, coordinator, mentor, etc. for matters or questions that arise during their internship, whether it be phone call, video call, interoffice chat, or another method of communication.



## **GAMMA IOTA SIGMA**

*The Insurance Industry's Premier Collegiate Talent Pipeline*

- **Monitor workload and progress.** Make sure the intern knows when and how to communicate if they have too much work or not enough.
  
- **Develop their network**

It is important for the intern to develop a professional network virtually. Identify other departments who might recognize mutual benefit from meeting or working with the intern. Consider rotational opportunities or an “intern swap,” in which two teams trade interns for a day to give them each exposure to a new area of the business. Identify alumni from the intern’s alma mater or who were also Gamma Iota Sigma members who are currently working at your organization and may be able to provide additional mentorship or guidance.
  
- **Foster intern collaboration**

Help the intern connect with other interns. If you plan to have more than one intern in your organization, consider grouping interns into teams for a joint project that would help them learn while also benefiting the organization. For example, have interns select a business problem to research, address, and virtually present a solution to division or organizational leaders at the conclusion of the internship. If your organization has only one intern, identify a partner firm or client who also has an intern, and coordinate an inter-organization team project that could help bolster your client relationship. Consider incorporating weekly intern challenges and games with prizes to make the internship experience fun and interactive.
  
- **Build internship virtual programming**

Provide the intern with opportunities for virtual networking and education, such as:

  - **Weekly educational webinars.** Invite individuals from a variety of functional areas within your organization to share their expertise with the intern(s). Schedule one employee or team to present to all interns virtually each week. Ask them to share their career paths, information on their specialty or function, and how it connects to other functions or departments within the organization.
  - **Coffee and conversations with an executive.** Host a live chat with a senior executive in your organization. Ask them to share career advice with the interns and open the floor for Q&A at the end.
  - **Alumni panel.** Host a live video call with employees who started within your organization as interns. Invite them to share their lessons learned as an intern, transition from intern to post-graduate professional, and encourage current interns to bring their own questions.
  - **Virtual book club.** Invite an employee to select a book on leadership, business, or other topic relevant to the internship experience, provide interns with a copy of the book, and then schedule a virtual meeting for the book club host to facilitate discussion and share lessons learned.
  - **Virtual wellness.** Organizations often incorporate wellness and fitness into employee networking opportunities. Consider how you can make these opportunities virtual to engage



## **GAMMA IOTA SIGMA**

*The Insurance Industry's Premier Collegiate Talent Pipeline*

- your interns. Consider a virtual lunchtime walking group or encourage friendly competition through a steps challenge.
- **Online learning.** Many organizations provide their employees access to insurance education providers or other services to build their business skillsets and acumen. Consider which of these opportunities may benefit interns and make those opportunities available to them.
- **Finish strong**  
Schedule a video conference meeting toward the end of the internship to share feedback on the intern's performance and discuss next steps. If your organization plans to hire full-time graduates, let the intern know how they can apply or be considered. If you are interested in considering the intern for future job opportunities, make plans to communicate with them regularly after the internship has concluded.