

Perceptions of Non-Academic Internships
Executive Summary for the
Society for Personality and Social Psychology

Non-academic internships might be an important resource for students looking to transition out of the academy: A student with non-academic work experience may be more competitive for full-time employment in the non-academic sector than a student without non-academic work experience. Therefore, this investigation explored the potential importance of non-academic internships and what factors may facilitate or prevent a student from participating in such an internship. Our study revealed the following insights:

Do SPSP Members Support Student Participation in Non-Academic Internships?

- Students are interested in, and faculty are supportive of, graduate student participation in non-academic internships, particularly during the summer
- Graduate students underestimate faculty members' support for student participation in non-academic internships

Do Faculty and Students Believe that Non-Academic Internships Help or Hurt Students?

- Students and faculty both agreed that internships could give students a competitive advantage in the non-academic job market
- Non-academics are nearly unanimous in reporting the importance of non-academic work experience--including internships--prior to applying for full-time positions
- Students and faculty are concerned about the loss of academic productivity during a non-academic internship
- Students revealed concerns about the impact of internships on their academic reputation

What Feasibility Concerns do Students Have about Internships?

- Aside from the time of year and duration of the internship, students ranked receiving a livable wage, advisor approval, the need for relocation, the need to find housing, and the costs of moving as the most important factors in deciding whether they would take an internship

What Factors Contribute to a Decision to Leave the Academy?

- Students express similar reasons for considering a non-academic career path as non-academic members do, including interest in applying their work in a real-world setting and their negative perceptions of the academic job market

In sum, SPSP membership is interested in, and supportive of, graduate student participation in non-academic internships. Although there are a number of concerns that graduate student and faculty members share regarding those internships, they may be easily overcome. In fact, one of the biggest barriers may be a lack of effective communication between faculty and students regarding non-academic career trajectories. In general, however, all sides seem welcoming and appreciative of this future resource.