

Student Internships in GIS
Thomas Chapman
Assistant Professor of Geography
Georgia Southern University

An internship is one of the most valuable steps you will ever take in getting a full time job when you graduate. It is especially useful for the GIS field, since future employers want to see direct application and practical experience of the technology skills you learn in school when hiring someone. For the most part, mid-level GIS managers or analysts will do the hiring for internships. The following are some tips on preparing a resume that will get their attention, what you can expect when you apply for an internship, and (hopefully) are hired.

Preparing a Resume

Target your audience. There are two kinds of internship resumes: Those that target a specific job posting, and those that are designed for a fishing expedition. They are both effective if you tailor your message correctly. Included is an internship resume template, and an example of a resume targeted for an internship that has yet to be created. If you do it right, you may actually inspire employers to create a new internship where none existed before.

Keep it simple. These folks are extremely busy. Nobody is going to read more than 2 pages. Include only the things that are relevant to GIS and any past job history (in that order). Keep in mind there is a big difference between a curriculum vitae and a resume. A c.v. may go on for many pages, and is entirely appropriate for academic positions. But for this sort of job, a c.v. will most likely be thrown in the trash.

A single spelling or grammar error may doom your chances. On more than one occasion, I've seen great resumes that are ignored because of a single misspelled word. Spelling and grammatical mistakes send a message to potential employers that you can't pay attention to detail (or are too lazy to use the spell checker in your word processor). And since so much of GIS is about the details, you will be passed over for someone else.

Prepare a cover letter. Again, keep it short and to the point. This is your chance to introduce yourself to a potential employer in one minute or less. One standard paragraph or two short paragraphs is plenty. Attached is an example of a good cover letter for a GIS internship.

Applying for an Internship

Follow up with posted positions. If you apply for a posted job, it is a good idea to follow up with a phone call a week later. Do not send an e-mail, it is too impersonal. If you are lucky enough to get the person who is actually doing the hiring, just tell him or her that you applied for the job, and that you that are very interested in working for the

organization. If you get voicemail or a secretary, leave a brief message. Do not call back again if you don't get a response, lest the employer thinks you are an annoyance.

Don't follow up with non-posted (potential) positions. If you send out a resume for a potential internship that has yet to be created, don't call them. They are too busy to talk to you about anything that might (or might not) develop in the future.

Screen your social networking websites. You can bet on the fact that that the first thing potential employers will do is search the web to check you out. Personal postings on sites such as MySpace or Facebook have ruined many college student's chances of being granted an interview. Follow this basic rule: If you have anything on these sites that would offend your grandmother, get it off the internet.

Once you Have the Job

GIS internships are where the rubber meets the road. They will most likely involve low level tasks, such as entering and editing data, scanning and digitizing maps, filing, answering the phone, collecting GPS data in the heat and the rain, and even getting coffee for your boss. Do not expect to walk into a job where you are the project manager. Even though these jobs can be dull and tedious at times, I guarantee you will learn an infinite amount about the entire GIS enterprise, just by being part of a team.

Most GIS professionals will gladly share their expertise with you (At least the ones who are any good). Ask questions. The more "institutional knowledge" you gain about these sorts of operations, the better off you will be. As with any profession, there is a language and lexicon that is unique to GIS. Learning this while doing an internship will give you a huge advantage when you apply for a permanent position. Information = Power.

Sample Internship Resume Template

Name

Address
City, State Zip Code
Email

Education

College, City, State, Graduation Date (Month/Year)
Degree, Major/Minor/Concentration
GPA (Overall and/or Major)

Honors & Awards

Honor Society, Dean's List, Scholarships

Objective(optional ?)

To obtain an internship in _____

Relevant Experience

Title, Organization, Location, Dates

Use action verbs to explain your responsibilities beginning with most recent experience first. Use concise language to create effective action verb statements highlighting skills and accomplishments. This section can include coursework and lab experience as well as previous jobs and internships.

The Relevant Experience section includes all information relevant to the position to which you are applying. It is the most important section of your resume since it provides information to the employer about any relevant skills and accomplishments you've developed so far.

Course Name, Academic Department, College, Dates

Identify the objectives of the course; including, projects, papers, and presentations.

Additional Experience

Title, Organization, Location, Dates

This section might include previous summer jobs (administrative, retail, on-campus jobs) where you have gained some solid transferable skills including organization, communication, interpersonal, and analytical skills.

Be selective on what you include in your resume. Remember to give priority to information relevant to the job or internship and focus on the skills developed as a result of the experience. All previous internships and/or jobs do not need to be included on every resume.

Co-Curricular Activities

Club Memberships, Sports, Music, Arts

Skills

List computer programs, foreign language, and any specialized skills you possess.

Source:

<http://internships.about.com/od/resumetipssamples/a/ResumeTemplate.htm>

February 3, 2008

Mr. Robert Newby
Manager, GIS Operations
City of Savanna
1600 Sherman Ave.
Savanna, GA 30445

Dear Mr. Newby:

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself as a possible candidate for GIS internship opportunities at the City of Savanna. I am currently a junior majoring in Geography at Georgia Northern University, with a minor in GIS. I have demonstrated strong academic performance, maintaining a GPA of 3.5 in all of my geography and GIS courses at Georgia Northern. The courses I have completed have given me a solid foundation in the theory, methodology and application of GIS. I hope to secure an internship that will help me gain the work experience I need to pursue a career in GIS.

I have enclosed a resume that provides more details of my skills and achievements. Thank you for taking the time to consider my track record, and please feel free to call or e-mail me if you have any possible opportunities in the near future.

Cordially,

John Doe
912-980-5573
jgdoe@georgianorthern.edu

Jane Doe

609 E. Cheesegrits Ave. #3
Savanna, GA 30472
912-482-7764
gwb03@georgianorthern.edu

Education

Georgia Northern University (expected graduation May 2008)
Major: Geography (B.A.) Minor: GIS
GPA: Overall - 3.3, Major – 3.7

Honors & Awards

Chattahoochee Rapids Community Foundation. Awarded full tuition scholarship for academic achievement. May 2005 – present.

Objective

To obtain an internship in GIS

Relevant Work Experience

GIS Lab Assistant. Georgia Northern University. September 2007 – present

- Direct users to resources for software operation; Monitor student GIS Lab use; Assist lab manager in simple maintenance and software testing

Related Coursework and Projects

Department of Geography, Georgia Northern University.

- *Introduction to Geographic Information Systems.* Focuses on basic GIS theory and practice; primary skill set is laboratory training on core ArcGIS software modules.
- *Intermediate GIS.* Objectives are primarily project-based; Primary skill set is training on more advanced functions of ArcGIS; Semester project: *Using GIS To Analyze Urban Sprawl in Brooklet, GA.*
- *Cartography.* Focuses on core mapping skills, cartographic representation, and visualization techniques
- *Quantitative Methods in Geography.* Primary objective is applying statistical methods with a focus on spatial statistics.

Additional Experience

Bank Teller. North Georgia Bank and Trust. Savanna, GA. May 2004 – June 2006. Provided excellent customer service by answering or referring financial questions to correct supervisory staff; processed monetary transactions averaging \$1 million per day; trained new tellers on computer banking system; recognized for increasing sales of additional services by 15%.

Co-Curricular Activities

Active member in local chapter of Gamma Theta Upsilon (academic geography honors society). October 1988-present.

Georgia Northern University Marching Band. First string Tuba Player. September 2005-May 2007.

Skills

Software skills: ArcGIS (ArcMap, ArcCatalog, Spatial Analyst, 3-D Analyst); Microsoft Office Suite (Word, Excel, Powerpoint); Adobe Acrobat

Fluent in Swahili and Mandarin Chinese

Resources

GIS Job and Internship Postings: First Floor of Herty Building

Georgia Southern Counseling and Career Center:

http://students.georgiasouthern.edu/counseling/services/groups_workshops.htm

Monster.com:

<http://www.monster.com/>

GISjobs.com:

<http://www.gisjobs.com/>

GIS Lounge:

<http://gislounge.com/internships-in-gis/>

GeoSearch:

<http://www.geosearch.com/candidates/gis-job-fields.asp?category=26>