

SUPERVISING AND MENTORING

One of the great benefits of hiring a student extern is that **he/she often brings a fresh new perspective** to the organization and/or department. That being said, the externship is still a learning opportunity, and effective supervision is essential to make sure the experience is successful for both the extern and organization.

Communication is critical when it comes to supervising an extern. This helps to ensure expectations are clearly defined and both the student and supervisor have the same understanding. It is recommended that weekly meetings are established in which the extern and supervisor can talk briefly. In addition, it is helpful for the extern to have another person he/she can go to with questions in case their direct supervisor is unavailable.

Being a mentor

Providing a solid supervisor is important, but **providing a mentor can take the externship experience from good to great!** A mentoring relationship is similar to that of a supervisor relationship. However, the mentor helps the student draw the connection between what they are doing in the workplace to what they have learned in the classroom through reflection. Having the extern **complete a self-evaluation** halfway through the experience, and again at the conclusion of the externship, is a great way to do this. In addition, a mentor may help the extern make **professional contacts** by taking the extern to networking events or professional development opportunities, as well as encouraging the extern to step outside of his/her comfort zone.

Providing feedback

Externs love to hear how they are doing. Do not hesitate to provide **constant constructive feedback** throughout the course of the externship. In addition, it can be helpful for the extern and supervisor to discuss the student's **learning objectives** at the halfway point of the externship to make sure the extern is on track and meeting the supervisor's expectations. Conducting an evaluation at the conclusion of the experience is a great way to end the externship, and it also helps the extern identify both strengths and areas for improvement, which might also be required if the extern is receiving academic credit. In this case, it is recommended to review the evaluation with the extern, if possible.

Handling difficult situations

While most externship experiences go very well for the extern and the organization, it may be necessary to part ways with an extern. Like any other employee within the organization, an extern should not be given special treatment when it comes to not meeting expectations (work products and/or behaviorally). **It is important to discuss and document the issue with the extern as soon as an issue arises. You may also contact the Office of Human Resources at externs@uspto.gov should you have any questions.**