



Animal Care Internships/Externships/Job Shadows updated 01/02/2024

The internship/externship/job shadow program at Dickerson Park Zoo is designed to provide an opportunity for college students to earn college credits or otherwise fulfill college requirements for graduation by performing an internship. The events/communications area and education department may occasionally accept an intern; but the information here is primarily directed at students from animal-related fields of study, which is the largest group of interns accepted by the zoo. Students grades 9-12 may also be accepted for job shadows and internships during the school year.

Job shadows are loosely defined as one- or two- day experiences. Anything longer than that is considered an internship or externship.

Interns are accepted from majors and minors such as biology, zoology, wildlife conservation and management, wildlife biology, captive wild animal management, fisheries and wildlife, animal science and similar fields. An occasional student may also be accepted from recreation or another field.

Interns are accepted each semester. Priority is given to those students who wish to do an internship for college credit or to otherwise meet a college requirement. Students and individuals who wish to do an internship just for the experience will be accommodated when possible and this can usually be done during fall and spring, and sometimes during summer or winter break. Making application as early as possible is recommended, especially for the summer semester and for winter break. Most summer internships are typically confirmed five to seven months before the beginning of the summer period. The winter break schedule, likewise, fills up many months ahead.

Several interns are accepted each semester. Fall, spring and summer semesters will each usually have a total of up to 25 or more interns doing internships of anywhere from 25 hours to more than 200 hours, depending on school requirements and individual requests. There will also be several one- or two-day job shadows in addition to the internships. Most of the job shadows are students in grades 9-12.

We work with colleges locally and regionally to provide internship opportunities but also accommodate students and individuals from throughout the United States and internationally. Most interns during the summer are from schools outside the Springfield area and many of them are not from the Springfield area. They come here specifically for the internship, work forty-plus-hour weeks until they reach their hourly requirement (150-160 hours for most), and then leave.

A small number of interns can also be accommodated during the winter break period which is usually long enough to provide an internship experience of 120-160 hours, depending on the length of the school break, for students and individuals whose schedules would allow them to work 40 or more hours per week.

Hourly requirements for internships vary from one school to another and even from one department to another within the same school. Information on them and approval to receive credit for them is given by students' advisors/professors. Most students we get that are doing them for credit are juniors or seniors and occasionally sophomores and freshmen. We schedule internships around student's school and work schedules as best we can to meet the students' hourly requirements. The zoo has no hourly requirement other than interns will not be accepted for anything less than three hours on any day they are here. The intern, extern or job shadow can work all day, 7:30-4:30, all morning, 7:30-1:30 or some portion of the morning period, but not less than three hours. We no longer schedule for afternoons only.

Internships are unpaid. Background checks and proof of negative TB tests within 12 months of the beginning of the internship are required for interns, externs, and job shadows working more than 16 total hours. Interns must provide their own food and transportation. For interns flying in, we will provide transportation to and from the airport (Springfield-Branson National Airport). We will also transport them as needed to purchase food and other supplies during their internship stay.

We have some room accommodations available on-site for interns and externs. Some rooms have twin size bunk beds while others have one or two single twin-size beds. We can accommodate up to seven or eight interns at one time. Rooms are located at and near the keeper/commissary building which is in active use every day of the year during the daytime. At night, only interns would typically occupy the buildings. Security guards patrol zoo grounds during the nighttime hours.

There is a shower in each of the two restrooms in the keeper/commissary building and the building also has a small kitchen area with stove, microwave, refrigerator/freezer and stocked with pots, pans and other kitchen utensils. There is a television with cable and the building has WIFI. Washers and dryers are also available on grounds. We ask that interns supply their own bath towels, pillows and bed linens. If traveling to the zoo by air or bus, we do have linens and pillows available for use. Most of our summer and winter break interns utilize these facilities. We do not charge for the use of the facilities. They are provided as a courtesy and for the sake of convenience. Rooms are very available during fall and spring semesters when we have fewer interns originating from outside the Springfield area.

The zoo is located near the intersection of Interstate 44 and Hwy13/Kansas Expressway. There are many restaurants, mostly fast food, located near the zoo and there is also a Walmart, Walgreens and several convenience stores. Interns are free to come and go when not working, and visitors are allowed within guidelines.

Interns work alongside animal keepers doing typical daily tasks such as cleaning, feeding, animal observation, education programs, training and enrichment, and minor maintenance and other work projects. They may also assist with or observe veterinary procedures that would occur within their work area. The education department has a collection of animals separate from the main zoo exhibit collection.

Dickerson Park Zoo would be considered a small- to medium-sized zoo. The animal collection totals 400-500 animals representing 150-170 species. The zoo is organized primarily by geographic themes such as Africa, South America, Australia, Missouri Habitats/North America, Tropical Asia and Diversity of Life.

Diversity of Life is primarily reptiles and amphibians and some invertebrates. A wide variety of venomous and non-venomous species are located there and in the surrounding area including rattlesnakes, cobras, vipers, poison frogs, python and anaconda, alligator, lizards, tortoises and others. Except for Diversity of Life, the other areas will each mainly have a variety of mammals and birds.

The African area houses African and other species such as giraffe, zebra, cheetah, lion, colobus monkey, ostrich, crane, stork, lemurs, red river hog or similar species, antelope, and capybara.

The South America/Australia area features rhea, maned wolf, flamingo, ibis, heron, peccary, spider monkey, squirrel monkey, capuchin, howler monkey, kangaroo, tamarin/marmoset, macaw, emu and other birds. The petting zoo is part of the Australia area and has domestic animals like goats and sheep.

Tropical Asia has elephant, tiger and siamang/gibbon exhibits.

Missouri Habitats/North America features species that are or once were native to Missouri or North America – black bear, bobcat, bald eagle, river otter, Mexican grey wolf, swift fox, white-tail deer, and wild turkey.

The education department program animals include birds of prey – eagles, hawks, owls, falcons, vulture – other birds, non-venomous snakes, lizards and turtles, invertebrates and small mammals – rabbit, tenrec, hedgehog, sugar glider, chinchilla, guinea pigs and rats.

Due to the nature of how the animal collection is organized, it is not possible to assign interns to only big cats or only primates or only elephants. Although the zoo is organized by geographic themes the animal care staff is organized by Missouri Habitats/North America, Tropical Asia, Reptiles/Amphibians/Invertebrates, Birds/Primates, and Carnivores/Hoofed Animals. Interns will generally be assigned to one of these sections for the duration of their internship. Longer internships, depending on the length of the internship, might be able to work more than one area. Interns will be asked to submit a list of preferences to assist us in making the work assignments.

There is no formal application period. Applications are accepted at any time. Applications can be emailed, faxed or sent by postal mail.

Applications and background check authorization forms are available. References and transcripts are not needed. There is currently no fee for an internship.

Interns should dress for the weather. Summer temperatures can occasionally exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and winter temperatures may occasionally drop below zero with occasional snow or ice. Humidity is typically somewhat high. Jeans or khaki slacks are the dress, and blue jean or khaki shorts are okay in warmer weather. Work boots are best, but tennis shoes are acceptable. T-shirts with the zoo logo will be issued to interns at no charge.

Beyond meeting school requirements and earning college credits, these internships are most valuable to students and individuals considering possible careers as zookeepers. Internship opportunities are also available to individuals who have already graduated from college. The internships provide training to prepare individuals for zoo careers. They provide real-life experience in a field where experience is often the primary qualification zoos look for in recruiting and hiring zookeepers.

The hospital area accepts students for undergraduate pre-veterinary internships, veterinary technician internships, and veterinary school preceptorship/externships. These internships/externships provide experience working with the two zoo veterinarians and two animal health technicians as well as some experience working with zookeepers. Use of intern living facilities is also available to hospital interns/externs. Capacity in the hospital area is much less than capacity working with zookeepers, so pre-vet internships are much more limited. Veterinary school students receive priority over undergraduate pre-veterinary students.

When applying for internships and externships, applicants should indicate on the application if they are pre-vet, vet-tech, or if they are a veterinary school student wanting a preceptorship/externship.

Dickerson Park Zoo