



 SOUTHERN UNION
STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WORK-BASED LEARNING

HANDBOOK

REVISED 02/16/26

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Defining Work-Based Learning	2
Program Overview	3
Why This Model is Important and Institutional Impact	4
Work-Based Learning Structure	5
General Eligibility for Work-Based Learning Experiences	6
Selection Criteria and Process	7
Internship/Work-Based Learning Agreements	8
Evaluation	9
Credit-Bearing Internships and Grading	10
Student Expectations	11
College Expectations	12
Code of Conduct	13
Faculty and Staff Guidelines	14
Employer Participation	15
Employer Expectations	16
Tracking and Reporting	17
Important Statements	18

INTRODUCTION

Work-Based Learning (WBL) connects classroom instruction with professional experience. It allows students to apply what they learn in real settings while building the technical, professional, and employability skills needed for today's workforce.

At Southern Union State Community College, WBL functions as a bridge between education and employment. Through collaboration among faculty, employers, and community partners, students gain purposeful experiences that deepen learning and prepare them for successful careers.

SHARED PURPOSE

The purpose of Work-Based Learning at Southern Union is to strengthen persistence, retention, and completion by embedding career-connected experiences into academic programs.

WBL is a collective effort across all divisions. Faculty, staff, and employers collaborate to design experiences that link academic outcomes with workplace expectations. This shared structure ensures that all students have equitable access to high-quality opportunities that support academic and career success.

This shared purpose reflects Southern Union's strategic goals to:

- Providing meaningful, hands-on learning that reinforces classroom instruction.
- Building sustainable partnerships with employers and industry leaders.
- Equipping students with the professional and technical skills needed for long-term career success.



DEFINING WORK-BASED LEARNING

Framework Alignment

The College's Work-Based Learning model builds upon the Alabama Work-Based Learning Handbook (2023), under the state's workforce development agencies. The statewide framework established a unified definition and structure for WBL across education and industry partners. It also takes into consideration prior processes established by the Academic and Technical Divisions.

Southern Union's model extends this work at the community college level by ensuring intentional, measurable, and accessible experiences for all students. This alignment supports Alabama's goal of strengthening the state's workforce pipeline through consistent, high-quality experiential learning.

Connection to Alabama's Work-Based Learning Continuum

The College's WBL framework mirrors Alabama's Career Awareness–Exploration–Preparation Continuum, adapted for the College as experiences:

Alabama WBL Continuum	SUSCC Work-Based Learning Experiences	Description of Alignment
Career Awareness & Exploration	Exploratory	Early-stage engagement and mid-level opportunities focused on exposure to industries and occupations with the application of developing skills.
Career Preparation	Immersive	Advanced opportunities where students demonstrate technical and professional readiness.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The SUSCC Work-Based Learning Program offers students a non-linear pathway of experiences designed to connect classroom learning with the workplace. The pathway is flexible, allowing students to engage at different stages based on their progress, eligibility, and goals.

Experience	Eligibility	Purpose	Examples
Exploratory	Open to all students	Introduces students to career options early through activities that build awareness and spark persistence by showing the relevance of academic studies.	Job shadowing, industry tours, career fairs, and volunteerism
Immersive	12+ credit hours 2.5 GPA	Allows students to apply advanced knowledge in professional settings, often serving as a bridge to employment by connecting learning directly to career outcomes.	Micro-internships, campus employment; Internships, program-specific courses, clinicals, practicums, or preceptorships).

Division-Specific Notes

Clinicals, practicums, and preceptorships required in certain programs, such as Health Sciences, follow their own curriculum processes. They are considered immersive experiences for integration in the work-based learning model, but participation remain program-based. Some Academic programs may require completion of specific coursework, such as English, math, or other prerequisites, before students are eligible to participate.

Career-Connected Campus Roles (Federal Work-Study)

Federal Work-Study and select campus jobs are recognized as foundational experiences. These roles build transferable skills like communication, reliability, teamwork, and problem-solving. While eligibility is set by financial aid, Career Services helps students connect the experience to career development.

WHY THIS MODEL IS IMPORTANT

Work-based learning is more than a résumé builder. It is both a student success initiative and a management strategy that strengthens persistence, retention, and completion while allowing the College to consistently track engagement across divisions.

1. Persistence

Early Engagement through Awareness Experiences

Awareness experiences introduce students to career pathways early and in accessible ways. By connecting coursework to real-world possibilities, these experiences build motivation, relevance, and a stronger commitment to remain enrolled.

2. Retention

Academic Progress and Applied Practice through Exploratory Experiences

Exploratory experiences allow students to engage more intentionally with career-aligned activities that reinforce academic purpose. By applying learning in structured settings, students remain engaged, see progress toward goals, and are more likely to persist.

3. Completion

Readiness and Transition through Immersive Experiences

Immersive experiences place students in deeper, professional-level environments that mirror the expectations of the workforce. These experiences support a confident transition from college to career and often lead directly to employment or advanced opportunities.

INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT

Setting eligibility thresholds for each pathway encourages academic progress and accountability. Each milestone motivates students to stay enrolled, build momentum, and strive for completion. The tiered structure also provides the College with consistent tracking and outcome data; strengthening evidence for student success and institutional reporting.

WORK-BASED LEARNING STRUCTURE

All WBL experiences follow a consistent structure to ensure alignment with programs of study, accountability for learning outcomes, and a positive experience for students, College, and employers. While specific requirements may vary by division or employer, the following elements are consistent across the program.

Alignment with Programs of Study

Most WBL experiences are connected to the student's program of study and designed to reinforce course objectives and industry competencies.

Measurable Learning Outcomes

Before the start of each placement, students, employers, and Career Services work together to establish learning objectives. These outcomes define the skills, knowledge, and behaviors students are expected to demonstrate and serve as benchmarks for evaluation.

Supervision and Mentorship

Every student is assigned a site supervisor or mentor who provides guidance, feedback, and professional support throughout the placement. Supervisors play a critical role in reinforcing workplace expectations and helping students integrate academic learning with professional practice.

Evaluation and Reflection

Student performance is evaluated based on professional conduct, achievement of learning goals, and the ability to apply academic knowledge to workplace tasks. Activities, coordinated by Career Services or faculty, help students process their experiences, identify strengths, and plan for continued growth.

Work Schedules

Work schedules are set jointly by the employer and student before placement and must accommodate the student's academic responsibilities. Hours vary by tier, employer, and determined by event or project scope. Immersive placements require 15–25 hours per week for the duration of the experience.

Attendance Policy

Immersive placements are semester-long (15–16 weeks). More than three absences or repeated tardiness may result in termination from the assignment. Students must follow the employer's handbook and site-specific rules for attendance and professionalism.

Pay and Benefits

Compensation is established by the employer and may vary based on the type of experience. While some opportunities, particularly exploratory or service-learning placements, may be unpaid, others may provide wages or stipends. Paid experiences must comply with federal, state, and institutional guidelines, and employee benefits are provided only at the discretion of the employer.

GENERAL ELIGIBILITY FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Students must be enrolled at Southern Union State Community College and be in good academic standing.

ELIGIBILITY

- Exploratory experiences are open to all students, regardless of the program of study.
- Immersive experiences require academic progress, as determined by Career Services and program guidelines.
- Division-specific requirements (e.g., clinicals, practicums, preceptorships) remain in place with the Division and must be established according to academic and program requirements.
- Federal Work-Study eligibility is determined by financial aid standards.

Meeting the minimum eligibility requirements does not guarantee internship placement.

Additional factors that influence placement include, but are not limited to, position availability and requirements, and the employer.



SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCESS

Participation in WBL follows a structured process to ensure students are prepared, meet academic and employer requirements, and are placed fairly. Opportunities will be posted in Handshake each semester, and students move through steps that include applying, eligibility review, and, when required, interviews with College representatives and employers. Clinicals, practicums, and preceptorships are exceptions: eligibility for these experiences is determined solely by the program curriculum and academic division, not by Career Services.

1. Search for Opportunities in Handshake

All opportunities will be posted in Handshake each semester and clearly identified. Students should review postings regularly and note that application deadlines are:

- **Fall Semester– June 1**
- **Spring Semester – November 1**
- **Summer Semester – March 31**

2. Expression of Interest

Students begin by completing the Internship Readiness & Interest Form in Handshake to outline the type of experience they are seeking, their availability and scheduling considerations, and their career interests and goals. The form also requires students to confirm that they meet basic eligibility such as credit hours and GPA. This step serves as a pre-screening evaluation with Career Services before the student is approved to move forward.

3. Eligibility Review

Career Services reviews credit-hour, GPA, and program requirements. Students who do not meet requirements may be redirected to more appropriate opportunities.

4. College Review

Eligible students will be scheduled for an interview or advising session with Career Services (and faculty, if needed). After the interview, students approved to participate must complete the Experience Request in Handshake.

5. Employer Selection

Employers review applications, conduct their own interviews, and make hiring decisions according to their policies. Offers may be contingent on requirements such as background checks or drug screenings.

6. Placement Confirmation

Once an offer is made and accepted, the experience is updated in Handshake to reflect the official placement details. After the Handshake record is approved, the student may begin the role.

INTERNSHIP/WORK-BASED LEARNING AGREEMENTS

All immersive experiences and job shadowing opportunities require completion of the Internship/Work-Based Learning Agreement through Handshake. This agreement serves as the official record between the student, employer, and College, and must be approved before the experience begins. By completing the agreement, both the student and employer agree to hold SUSCC harmless from any claims or liabilities arising from participation in the experience.

Info	Details
Student Information	Name, program of study, credit hours completed, GPA confirmation, and contact details.
Employer Information	Organization name, site supervisor, work location, and contact details.
Experience Details	Description of the role or shadowing activities, schedule, total expected hours, and whether the experience is paid or unpaid.
Learning Outcomes	For internships and other immersive experiences, three to five measurable goals established collaboratively by the student, supervisor, and in some cases faculty. For job shadowing, learning goals are simplified to focus on observation and career awareness.
Supervision and Mentorship	Identification of the site supervisor or mentor responsible for student guidance.
Policies and Expectations	Acknowledgment of safety rules, professional conduct, confidentiality, and liability protections.
Approvals	Electronic signatures from the student, employer, and College representative.

Termination/Release Clause

Work-based learning placements may be ended at any time due to student withdrawal, misconduct, lack of academic eligibility, employer concerns, or if the site is deemed no longer appropriate by the College. Termination decisions will be communicated to all parties, and Career Services will document the reason for release in Handshake.

All agreements are managed through Handshake to ensure consistency, tracking, and accountability across the College.

EVALUATION

All Internship/Work-Based Learning Agreements include midterm and final evaluations, managed through Handshake. These evaluations provide feedback from both the employer and the student to ensure accountability, support continuous improvement, and measure outcomes.

Employer Evaluation of Student

Site supervisors complete an evaluation of the student’s performance at midterm and final stages. Areas assessed include professional skills, technical ability, dependability, communication, and overall performance.

Student Evaluation of Experience

Students complete an evaluation of their placement at midterm and final stages. Areas assessed include the connection of the experience to their program of study, skills gained, quality of supervision, and challenges encountered.

Experience Type	Evaluator	Timing	Method	Focus Areas
Industry Tours, Career Fairs, Volunteerism	N/A	N/A	Attendance tracked in Handshake	N/A
Job Shadowing and Micro-Internships	Site Supervisor	Final only (optional brief reflection)	Handshake Evaluation Form	Attendance, professionalism, engagement
	Student	Final only (brief reflection)	Handshake Evaluation Form	Career awareness, insights gained
Immersive	Site Supervisor (or Instructor)	Midterm & Final	Handshake Evaluation Form	Professional skills, technical ability, dependability, communication, overall performance
	Student	Midterm & Final	Handshake Evaluation Form	Connection to program, skills gained, quality, challenges



CREDIT-BEARING INTERNSHIPS AND GRADING

Some programs offer internship courses for academic credit, such as BUS 296 Business Internship or other discipline-specific equivalents. To ensure consistency across the College, these experiences will also be entered and tracked through Handshake.

While Career Services oversees the administrative documentation and verification process in Handshake, faculty coordinators retain full responsibility for instruction, supervision, and grading within their respective courses. Students enrolled in credit-bearing internships must follow all faculty-issued instructions, assignments, and reporting requirements in addition to any employer expectations.

Grades for credit-bearing internships are determined by the faculty coordinator based on established course criteria, which may include verified hours, professional performance, employer feedback, and achievement of learning outcomes. Employer evaluations completed in Handshake may be used as part of the grading process, but final grade determination remains the responsibility of the instructor.

Since registration is tied to academic credit, students must adhere to the published deadlines to allow adequate time for processing all documentation and course registration. Late submissions may delay placement approval or result in ineligibility for credit during the current semester.

This hybrid approach ensures that all internships, credit-bearing and non-credit, are documented consistently in Handshake for institutional tracking, while academic divisions maintain full control over course grading, requirements, and curriculum alignment.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Participation in work-based learning is a professional commitment. Students are expected to uphold high standards of conduct, responsibility, and communication throughout their internship, representing Southern Union State Community College with integrity and excellence. The Student will:

Professional Conduct

Represent the College and host site with integrity, professionalism, and a positive attitude. Follow all workplace policies, including those related to attendance, punctuality, dress code, safety, and conduct.

Adherence to Internship Agreement

Complete all required forms, assignments, evaluations, and learning objectives by designated deadlines. Attend scheduled internship hours and notify the supervisor and College liaison of any changes or absences in advance.

Academic Standing

Maintain the required GPA and enrollment status as specified by the program. Remain in good academic and disciplinary standing with the College throughout the internship period.

Learning Objectives

Collaborate with an instructor or college representative and the employer to establish Measurable Learning Outcomes. Reflect on and document progress toward learning outcomes throughout the experience.

Workplace Readiness

Come prepared to contribute meaningfully to the workplace. Demonstrate responsibility, initiative, time management, and teamwork.

Communication

Interns must maintain respectful, professional communication and respond promptly to College and employer requests.

Confidentiality and Ethics

Maintain confidentiality of proprietary and sensitive company information. Avoid any conflict of interest and refrain from offering or accepting inappropriate advice or benefits.

Feedback and Evaluation

Participate in performance evaluations and be open to feedback for improvement. Complete College-required internship reflection or assessment forms as assigned.

Compliance

Interns must follow all safety and workplace policies and promptly report incidents or changes in status to the College liaison.

COLLEGE EXPECTATIONS

Southern Union State Community College is committed to providing a structured and supportive WBL experience. The College will:

Program Oversight & Coordination

Designate a College representative or coordinator to serve as the primary point of contact for employers and students. Establish and maintain Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with participating employers.

Student Preparation & Placement

Promote WBL opportunities to eligible students across divisions. Screen and refer qualified students based on academic standing, program requirements, and employer needs. Ensure students are informed of expectations, policies, and procedures before placement begins.

Learning Integration

Collaborate with students and employers to develop Measurable Learning Outcomes (MLOs) that align with the student's program of study. Ensure WBL experiences reinforce classroom instruction and support career exploration and skill development.

Evaluation & Academic Credit

Gather feedback from the employer regarding student performance. Evaluate student work and MLOs to determine grades (when course credit is awarded). Maintain academic records related to internship participation and outcomes.

Monitoring & Support

Maintain regular communication with the employer and student during the internship period. Conduct site visits, virtual check-ins, or evaluations to monitor student progress and workplace conditions. Provide support in resolving any issues or concerns that may arise.

Compliance & Safety

Ensure that WBL placements occur in safe, inclusive environments. Verify that internship sites meet program standards and comply with legal and accreditation requirements. Intervene and take appropriate action if safety or policy violations are reported.

Continuous Improvement

Review internship data and feedback for program assessment and refinement. Align internship offerings with workforce trends, employer feedback, and student outcomes.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Safety

Students must comply with all safety rules and procedures established by the host site and complete any required safety training before beginning work.

Drug & Weapon-Free Workplace

The use, possession, or distribution of illegal drugs, controlled substances, or unauthorized weapons is strictly prohibited at all internship locations.

Workplace Violence

Acts or threats of violence, intimidation, or harassment in any form will not be tolerated and must be reported immediately.

Harassment

Southern Union State Community College (SUSCC) prohibits harassment, assault, or discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, marital status, disability, gender, age, or any other protected class under federal or state law. Such behavior violates SUSCC and Alabama Community College System policies and will not be tolerated on campus, at off-campus sites, or during any College-sponsored activity.

Personal Relationships

Interns must maintain professional boundaries during the internship. Romantic or intimate relationships with internship supervisors or co-workers are strongly discouraged and may be subject to review if they create a conflict of interest or impact the learning environment.

Academic Integrity

Interns who violate College rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of dismissal from the Internship Program. For more information on academic integrity and student discipline, consult the Southern Union State Community College Student Handbook and Catalog, accessible at www.suscc.edu.

Appropriate Communication

Interns must maintain professional communication at all times, both in person and through email, messaging platforms, and social media.

Prohibited Advice

Internship supervisors and company representatives may not provide personal, legal, financial, or medical advice to interns.

Liability

Students and employers agree to hold Southern Union State Community College, its representatives, and employees harmless from any claims, damages, or expenses arising from participation in the Internship Program.

Fees and Services

Students shall not be charged any fees or required to purchase services or products as a condition of participating in an internship.

Use of Technology Resources

Interns must use employer technology resources responsibly, following company policies and only for tasks directly related to their internship role.

FACULTY & STAFF GUIDELINES

Role of Faculty & Staff

Faculty and staff play a critical role in supporting the implementation of WBL by helping students connect classroom learning with career experiences. Faculty serve as subject matter experts, mentors, and liaisons to ensure that WBL opportunities align with student learning outcomes and academic progress. Staff provide operational and advising support to guide students through the process.

Faculty Responsibilities

- Inform students of WBL postings in Handshake and encourage participation across all tiers.
- Refer students to Career Services for employability skill support; provide recommendations when required.
- Collaborate with Career Services on employer challenges, guest lectures, or projects; allow space for reflection where appropriate.
- Share feedback on student preparedness and alert Career Services of any concerns during placements.

Career Services Staff

- Manage Handshake postings, Expression of Interest forms, and Experience Requests.
- Conduct pre-screening and eligibility reviews for Exploratory, Foundational, and Immersive experiences (excluding work-study, clinicals, practicums, and preceptorships).
- Track participation and outcomes in Handshake for accountability and reporting.
- Provide workshops, employability skills training, and individual coaching to prepare students.

Division Staff

- Oversee eligibility for clinicals, practicums, and preceptorships, following program-specific curriculum requirements.
- Maintain communication with Career Services to align academic and career development efforts.

Expectations for Collaboration

- Faculty and staff are expected to promote WBL as a college-wide initiative.
- Collaboration between divisions, Career Services, and academic leadership ensures that WBL opportunities are consistent, equitable, and accessible across programs.
- Faculty and staff should work with Career Services to ensure employer partners receive appropriate support and communication during student placements.

Accountability

- Faculty and staff contributions are recorded and included in program reporting.
- Career Services provides annual outcomes and uses campus input for improvement.



EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION

Employers are essential partners in work-based learning, providing students with opportunities to connect academic learning to real workplace experiences. By offering activities such as industry tours, guest lectures, job shadowing, micro-internships, or full internships, employers help students explore careers, develop transferable skills, and apply advanced knowledge in authentic settings. These partnerships not only benefit students, but also give employers the opportunity to shape future talent pipelines and evaluate potential employees.

Career Services serves as the central point of contact for employer engagement, and all opportunities are coordinated through Handshake to ensure consistency in postings, documentation, and tracking. Employers establish their own selection processes, which may include applications, interviews, background checks, or drug screenings, and communicate offers directly to students. Both employers and students are expected to notify Career Services of final selections so placements can be recorded for accountability and reporting.

Employer contributions may include:

- Providing career awareness opportunities such as tours, panels, and job shadowing.
- Hosting project-based or micro-internship experiences that strengthen student skills.
- Offering internships or other immersive opportunities.
- Giving feedback on student performance and program effectiveness.

EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS

Southern Union State Community College greatly values its employer partners and seeks to establish strong, mutually beneficial relationships through work-based learning.

Employers participating in the program are expected to:

Provide a Safe and Inclusive Environment

Maintain a workplace free of discrimination, harassment, violence, and hazards. Ensure the intern receives appropriate safety orientation and training before beginning work.

Designate a Supervisor or Mentor

Assign a qualified staff member to provide day-to-day supervision, guidance, and mentorship. Serve as the main point of contact for the College regarding student progress and feedback.

Offer Meaningful Work Experiences

Develop a job description that aligns with the intern's academic program and career goals. Provide hands-on tasks and learning opportunities that contribute to the intern's skill development.

Support Learning Outcomes

Collaborate with the College and student to establish Measurable Learning Outcomes (MLOs). Provide regular feedback to the student regarding performance, strengths, and areas for improvement.

Coordinate Scheduling

Establish a work schedule that supports the intern's academic commitments. Ensure the intern works the agreed number of hours per week without unauthorized overtime.

Monitor and Evaluate Intern Performance

Complete at least one formal evaluation during or at the conclusion of the internship. Participate in reviewing the evaluation with the intern and the College liaison when needed.

Comply with Program Policies

Abide by all applicable employment laws and internship program agreements. Not charge fees, sell services, or require purchases from interns as a condition of participation.

Communicate with the College

Notify the College promptly of any changes in intern status, performance concerns, or workplace issues. Support the College's monitoring efforts, including site visits or virtual check-ins.



TRACKING AND REPORTING

Handshake serves as the official system of record for all WBL opportunities. Career Services records student participation through sign-ups, Expression of Interest forms, Experience Requests, and attendance tracking, while faculty and staff may provide additional documentation through referrals, course assignments, or division reports.

Each semester, Career Services compiles data on participation and completion, and an annual report is produced to summarize engagement across the Exploratory, Foundational, and Immersive pathways. These reports emphasize outcomes related to persistence, retention, and completion, as well as alignment with employer and community needs.

Data and feedback from students, faculty, and employers are shared with campus leadership to inform continuous improvement, and tracking processes are reviewed annually to ensure accuracy and effectiveness.

IMPORTANT STATEMENTS

Non-Discrimination Statement

It is the official policy of the Alabama Community College System and entities under its control, including Southern Union State Community College, that no person shall be discriminated against on the basis of any impermissible criterion or characteristic, including, without limitation, race, color, national origin, religion, marital status, disability, sex, age, or any other protected class as defined by federal and state law. (ACCS Policies 601.02 and 800.00)

Equal Employment Opportunity

Southern Union State Community College is an equal opportunity employer. It is imperative that employers participating in the Academic Internship Program adhere to and embrace this culture of non-discrimination and employment opportunity.

Disability Statement

Any individual who qualifies for reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) should notify their supervisor and the College representative immediately.



