

# ARE UNPAID INTERNSHIPS ETHICAL?

*THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 90 MINUTES. IF LEARNERS ARE ABLE TO REVIEW MEDIA PRIOR TO THE LESSON, ACTIVITY TIME SHOULD BE 45 TO 60 MINUTES.*

## INVESTIGATE

Read, watch, and listen to the three media resources on the Thinkalong module. Learners can use the Investigate graphic organizer to summarize each piece of media and record new information. Below are summaries of the three pieces of media curated in the Thinkalong module.

### IS IT TIME TO ABOLISH UNPAID INTERNSHIPS?

Above the Noise | June 9, 2021 | Video  
9:39 minutes

This KQED video questions whether unpaid internships should be abolished based on fair they are to students.

- Today, 1/3 of Americans 25 and older have a college degree, making entry-level jobs more competitive. Because of this, more people want to work at popular companies, even if it's for no pay.
- In industries such as entertainment, publishing, fashion, the arts, and the non-profit sector, unpaid internships are common, because the number of people who want them is greater than the actual number of internships available.
- Unpaid internships are easier to manage for students who have an outside source of cash (such as parental support), so they tend to attract people who don't have to work a paid job on top of the unpaid internship.
- A survey from 2015 found that 44% of unpaid interns got job offers with a median starting salary around \$34,000. Paid interns got job offers 72% of the time and made \$53,000.

### HOW THE PAID INTERNSHIP MOVEMENT HAS EVOLVED

WBUR | February 17, 2020 | Audio  
5:30 minutes

This segment talks to Carlos Mark Vera, founder of the non-profit Pay Our Interns, about the importance of paying interns.

- Many internships in the U.S. remain unpaid, and many companies and organizations don't take the difficulties low-income students face into consideration. Unpaid internships come with expenses, such as transportation and professional clothing.
- Carlos sees unpaid internships as elitist because they assume that students have the support necessary to be able to take on unpaid work.
- While some small companies and non-profits struggle to be able to pay their interns, Carlos states that even small stipends which cover transportation and food would be helpful. Even further, organizations can work with universities, which more and more frequently are offering stipends for student interns. There are also tax credits in some states for companies which offer paid internships.

## THE NEW RULES OF INTERNSHIPS

Marketplace Money | May 16, 2014 | Audio

4:38 minutes

Barbara Bogaev talks to the Wall Street Journal's Rachel Feintzeig about the new rules regarding internships.

- Lawsuits in recent years have extended employment discrimination laws, but employers and universities are instituting more protections for student interns.
- Some employers are doing away with internship programs altogether, while others are moving to paid internship programs.
- New rules say that unpaid interns can't do anything that a paid employee would do as part of their job. Internships must have a "direct educational benefit" for the student intern. Feintzeig says that employers shouldn't benefit from the internship, that it is meant to be an educational opportunity for the student.
- Feintzeig says that data shows that unpaid internships don't usually lead to paid job opportunities, but paid internships do.

### KEY WORDS

Look out for these important keywords in the news stories. Discuss the definitions with your learners and see how they affect the understanding of the story.

- Ethical
- Labor laws
- Compensation

## CONTEMPLATE

Learners will use media literacy questions to critically engage with news by thinking about its purpose, searching for bias and discussing missing perspectives. They will answer the 5 Key Questions of Media Literacy created by the Center for Media Literacy, which are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

A graphic organizer is included in this guide and the Thinkalong website to help learners answer these five questions about each piece of media.

## DEBATE

Use the debate tool on the module webpage to help form evidence-based responses to the debate question.

Thinkalong is designed to help learners engage with real issues that are relevant to their lives. [Structured discussions](#) allow learners to practice their critical thinking skills through evidence-based debate with their peers. Discussions are designed to take about 30 minutes. Educators are encouraged to modify aspects that work best for their learners.

To encourage civil discourse, please review the [Code of Conduct](#) with your learners.

*Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help learners to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.*