Research Internship for PhDs

Majority of PhD students at the start of their program often know whether their long-term career interest lie in academia or the industry. For either case, undergoing at least one industrial research internship during a PhD program is a huge advantage, more so for those interested in an industry career.

While getting it can be challenging, there are steps to be taken that increases one’s odd of landing one if not multiple internships offer. Here are some guidelines, chronologically:

* The earlier you decide you would like to go on an internship during your program, the better. Ideally, you should know by the start of your program. This will help in ensuring your PhD goals vis-a-vis going on an internship align with the expectations of your research advisor. This will also assist you in developing a road map of your research progress and course completion for the initial part of your program (more on this in the next bullet).
* Completing the required course credits before your third year makes planning for internships a lot easier. That way, you have more bandwidth to navigate the process.
* Be COMPETENT in your research. This goes without saying, but it is primarily the most important factor in landing a research internship. See your research as an opportunity to learn while doing good science you can use to convince potential employer of your capabilities.
* Be active on LinkedIn, academic Twitter (X) communities or any other online professional space to keep abreast of the expectations of employers in your field, make meaning connections and create an initial list of companies. You should start on this as early as your first year to help you in deciding the hard skills in your lab that would be most essential to your long-term career.
* Beyond research, meet with people, senior colleagues in your lab that have been on internship or alumni of the program that are doing well in the space you see yourself long-term. You do not need to ask anyone for help at this point, just talk to people willing to share their experiences with you.
* Again, do good work, and publish your results. Although this not a requirement for most research internship, it does help.
* Decide on what summer in your program (depending on your personal PhD goals and advisor’s expectations) and start actively working on your internship application one summer in advance.
* Create a one- or two-pages resume based on your year (2nd & 3rd years probably want to stick to a page) focusing on research experience and skills. You can work with Purdue CCO to get your resume reviewed.
* Review the list of recurring opportunities posted on Purdue Chemistry page and make plans to apply as soon as the July of the year preceding the year you plan to go on an internship.
* Start actively applying by August through November. One’s odds generally increase with the quantity of applications in any job-search process. Of course, with a good balance of quality.

Remember, keep an open mind in your search and interests but also make sure any opportunities you are considering aligns somewhat with your long-term goal.

Best of luck!