

**USGS Pathways Managers Sessions
Questions and Answers
March 10 and 11, 2015**

Internship Program (Temporary Interns and Career Interns)

Q: If you are recruiting graduate students, do they have to be enrolled as a full time graduate student or would someone just taking graduate courses at a university qualify?

Answer: In order to apply for the Internship program, students must be enrolled or accepted for enrollment in a degree/certificate seeking program. If enrolled, must be at least a half-time student (as defined by the institution) and have a satisfactory academic record, 2.0 or better cumulative grade point average.

Q: For Career Interns, how are the Federal Employee Health Benefit (FEHB) premiums handled if they are able to “flex” between full and part-time work schedules? Does the Interns portion of health insurance premium change when their status changes from full to part time work?

Answer: Yes. If the Career Intern appointment is for more than 1 year then during the part-time work schedule the FEHB employee's costs will be prorated, when working full-time it will not be prorated. The recent FEHB rules have changed for Temporary Interns not to exceed 1 year or less appointment. There are various scenarios depending on the type of intern appointment, length of appointment and the number of hours worked which may change the costs for the intern's share of FEHB. Contact your servicing Benefits Specialist for more information for your situation.

Conversions/Terminations/Promotions

Q: If an Intern is converted within 120 days to a term position, can he/she be converted to a permanent position later within the term position?

Answer: Yes. An Intern may be converted to a term appointment within the intern's 120 day period and later be converted to a permanent appointment if prior to the expiration of the term appointment.

Q: When a Career Intern has completed his/her internship and are then eligible for conversion to a permanent or term appointment, if the manager finds he/she does not have available work and cannot convert, can the Career Intern seek positions available for conversion in other agencies (not just in USGS)? Can they convert to outside of DOI?

Answer: When the intern has completed his/her degree requirements and program requirements, he/she is eligible for noncompetitive conversion to a permanent/term appointment within 120 days. During this time period he/she should seek other vacancies within USGS and other agencies through USAJOBS. The intern will need to read the announcements to determine if the agency is accepting applications for those eligible for noncompetitive conversion and he/she qualifies for the position then apply for consideration.

Q: Can you explain the 120 day requirement for the Intern? Including how and when we can terminate employment?

Answer: Career interns are given 120 days to be noncompetitively converted to a permanent/term appointment after completion of their degree requirements. If the intern will not be converted due to lack of funds, no position available, termination should occur at the end of the 120 days; otherwise if you terminate prior to the 120 days Reduction in Force (RIF) procedures may be required. If this situation occurs, you will need to contact your servicing HR Specialist on the steps that will need to be taken.

Q: Can an intern be terminated at any time during their education? Or am I required to keep them employed until they graduate?

Answer: You may terminate an intern at any time prior to his/her graduation date, but you may need to follow certain processes and provide certain rights before terminating the intern.

Career Interns

If the reason for termination is based on conduct or performance issues you may be able to terminate the appointment. You must work with your servicing Employee Relations Specialist, who will advise you on the documentation requirements and steps to take.

If the reason for termination is lack of funds, lack of work, etc., then you are required to follow reduction-in-force procedures if you want to terminate the appointment prior to the intern completing their academic program plus the 120-day conversion period. If this is the case, you must work with your servicing HR Specialist to determine the necessary steps.

Temporary Interns

A temporary intern's appointment can be terminated without having to take any additional steps: (1) on his/her not-to-exceed date; or (2) when the requirements of their academic program have been completed.

If you want to terminate an appointment outside of the circumstances described above, then you will need to contact your servicing HR Specialist to determine the necessary steps that apply to your specific situation, i.e., reduction-in-force procedures must be followed in some cases.

Q: If my intern is accepted to a graduate program during the 120 days, can he/she continue under the Pathways Intern Program?

Answer: Yes. The intern can remain in the Internship program. The intern must provide documentation such as an acceptance letter or proof of enrollment in a degree program before the 120 day conversion period. The supervisor must agree to have the intern continue as an intern and a new Pathways agreement must be established.

Q: When Pathways first started we were told that Temporary Interns could be converted to permanent/term appointments without competition, but that appears to not be correct? Since this was not known originally, are there exceptions for the original Pathways hires?

Answer: Temporary Interns are eligible for noncompetitive conversion to permanent and term appointments as long as the announcement for which they were selected had the statement in the vacancy announcement. Please note that these situations should be rare since the intent of a temporary intern is to complete short-term projects or summer work.

Q: Can a Career Intern who is graduating in May with a bachelor's degree and now enrolling into graduate school, be promoted without re-announcing the job if the original announcement they were hired from had a higher full performance level ?

Answer: The Career Intern may be promoted up to the full performance level that was advertised in the announcement.

Q: If you hire a Career Intern and then realize they are not a good fit for the job, is it as difficult to terminate as he/she were already a permanent employee? If you hire a Career Intern and then realize they are not a good fit for the job, do you have to follow the same termination process as a permanent employee?

Answer: If you are terminating an intern due to performance or conduct problems, work with your Employee Relations Specialist. Termination as a condition of employment in the Pathways Program only occurs when the Intern is separated at the end of the 120 day period after completion of the academic degree requirement. If the termination occurs before the end of the 120-day period, the agency must determine if the Intern meets the definition of "employee" in chapter 75 of title 5 and is entitled to procedural and appeal rights before taking any action to remove the Intern. If it is determined that the Intern has appeal rights, then the adverse actions procedures in 5 CFR 752 would apply to a termination occurring prior to the end of the 120-day period.

Q: What would be an example of an exception to allow conversion without competition for a Temporary Intern?

Answer: An example of an exception would be that you have a current permanent or term employee who accepted another job and the temporary intern has the skill set you need to complete or take over those responsibilities. If the Temporary Intern is completing his/her degree program and meets the other requirements for conversion, i.e. 640 hours of work experience, and when appointed the

announcement stated eligibility for noncompetitive conversion, then you can convert the Temporary Intern to a permanent or term appointment.

Q: A manager plans to convert a Temporary Intern (stated in announcement eligible for noncompetitive conversion to permanent/term appointment) to a term position. The not to exceed date is the intern's graduation date of June 15, 2015. What documentation needs to be provided in order to convert by June 15, 2015?

Answer: Supporting documentation for completion of degree requirements must be provided. The intern needs to contact his/her college advisor/school official to request a letter (e.g., dean of the academic program) stating that he/she met the degree program requirements. A letter from the school stating the student met the degree requirements will satisfy as documentation that he/she successfully completed the degree requirements for conversion. The graduate will later need to provide official transcripts to the Human Resources Office to be included in his/her electronic Official Personnel File (eOPF).

A Temporary Intern appointment ends on the date the student completes his/her degree requirements not the day of their graduation date. In some circumstances, a Temporary Intern appointment may be extended while he/she is still a "student". If you plan to convert a temporary employee based on the conversion eligibility, contact your HR servicing specialist as soon as possible to request an extension. Agencies have discretion to extend for up to 120 days in order to get the documentation required for conversion.

Q: A Pathways temporary intern cannot be promoted, but do we specify an FPL, in case they are converted?

Answer: A Temporary Intern is hired to do temporary short term projects or summer work. A Temporary Intern announcement will not state a full performance level (FPL) because Temporary Interns cannot be promoted. To seek a higher grade level the Temporary Intern would have to apply for an external or internal announcement for which he/she qualified for.

If the Temporary Intern meets his/her degree requirements and intern program requirements (stated in the announcement eligibility for noncompetitive conversion to a permanent/term appointment) the Temporary Intern may be noncompetitively converted to a permanent/term position in the grade for which qualified.

Recruitment

Q: In the slide for Advertisement Flexibilities- under "Limit # of Applications received" – Is that a first come, first served basis? What if you limit to 20 applications, but only 15 are qualified?

Answer: We have the discretion to limit the number of applications such as the first 25 applications received when filling a given Pathways position. When using such limits, any applications received until 11:59 p.m. ET of the day the limit will be accepted. Limiting the number of applications may not get you the best qualified candidate. If you usually received a large pool of qualified applicants on your vacancies then setting a limit may be a flexibility you want to use for your Pathway vacancies. Consult with your HR Specialist to discuss options that are available for you to consider.

Q: Since veteran preference must be applied to Pathways, is there any reason to advertise Merit Promotion (MP) or just Delegated Examining Unit (DEU)?

Answer: As a hiring official, you need to consider what type of appointment best fits the work that is needed. Veterans' preference does not only apply to Pathways vacancies, but also to announcements advertised under Delegated Examining Unit (DEU). Merit Promotion (MP) would be appropriate if recruiting from current or former federal employees, which would be a different applicant pool.

Q: For Temporary Interns, would it be advisable to put the language "may be eligible for convert to a term/permanent position upon successful completion of degree requirements," in every announcement?

Answer: To allow for flexibility HR recently placed this remark on all of the template vacancy announcements and will be on all future announcements unless a manager does not want to include this statement. Since the temporary appointment is for short term needed work, i.e. summer or time limited project that is expected to end, conversion to term/permanent appointment should be rare.

Based on your workforce you will be able to anticipate most of your hiring needs for permanent and/or temporary positions. For example, if you anticipate an employee retiring in a couple of years you may wish to hire a Career Intern instead of a temporary Intern.

Recent Graduate (RG) Program

Q: Can you hire a Recent Graduate for STEM positions at the GS-11?

Answer: Yes. The Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) occupations under the Recent Graduate Program may be hired up to the GS-11.

Q: Regarding the Recent Graduate Program, I've seen somewhere that the appointment may be extended to a second year before being converted to a term or permanent appointment? Is that correct?

Answer: The Recent Graduate Program is a one year program with the current exception for the 1102 series (contract specialist) which is a 2 year program. An extension for up to 120 days may be made in rare or unusual situations. Extensions may be granted to provide for time such as time lost through prolonged illness; bereavement; absences during the program for 30 days or more due to military service.

Q: What is the process to ask for an extension under the Recent Graduate Program if you have these unusual situations?

Answer: The extension will be documented by the immediate supervisor and submitted to the Pathways Program Coordinator through the servicing HR office. The request must be submitted to DOI for approval at least 30 days in advance of the participant's due date of conversion.

Q: We have a student who graduated in December with his/her bachelor's degree and is not interested in attending graduate school. Since we are still within 120 day window for conversion can we convert the person to a Recent Graduate?

Answer: No. Individuals on Pathways Internship appointments are eligible only for consideration for noncompetitive conversions to positions in the competitive service and only if the Intern program requirements are met. The recent graduate must apply and compete for Recent Graduate announcements to be considered.

Q: For the Recent Graduate Program, if a student is graduating this coming May, would they qualify for a Recent Graduate announcement if flown now (before they actually graduate)?

Answer: USGS will accept applications from individuals who will complete their educational degree/certificate by the closing date of the announcement.

Q: Is the mentor requirement for Recent Graduates Program referring to the USGS formal mentor program or may the hiring official assign a mentor informally?

Answer: No, you do not need to use the USGS formal mentoring program. Each Recent Graduate is assigned a mentor who is an employee outside the Recent Graduates chain of command. The Recent Graduates Pathways Agreement has a section where you can document the process used to identify a mentor. Visit the USGS Pathways Recent Graduates Pathways website to view a copy of the agreement at <http://www.usgs.gov/humancapital/sw/graduateprogram.html>

Q: If the Recent Graduate appointment is for one year? Must you terminate or convert within one year?

Answer: A Recent Graduate is appointed for 1 year (exception for 1102 series-Contract Specialist is 2-years) and must either be converted to a term or permanent appointment on the 1 year anniversary or be terminated. Extension of the program period may be extended for up to an additional 120 days to cover rare or unusual circumstances or situations with prior DOI approval.

Q: What series is a Recent Graduate hired under and what FPL should be designated?

Answer: Recent Graduates may be hired for any General Schedule or Federal Wage Grade series. The full performance level (FPL) of the position must have promotion potential higher than the grade for which announced. For instance, if you announced for a GS-201-09 Human Resources Specialist position the FPL or promotion potential must be a GS-11 or above.

Q: Can a Recent Graduate (RG) who has completed his program and is eligible for conversion to a permanent or term appointment be converted outside of USGS?

Answer: If a manager does not have an available position and cannot convert a Recent Graduate, we recommend that the manager inform his Recent Graduate as soon as possible. The manager and/or RG may reach out to other USGS offices/centers or bureaus to see if a position may be available for conversion. A RG may **not** be converted to a position outside of the Department of Interior (DOI) without competing.

Other Pathways or Miscellaneous Questions

Q: Would it be possible to get a copy of the USGS Pathways Managers presentation material?

Answer: Yes. A copy of the presentation is on the USGS Human Capital A-Z website under Supervisor Information at: <http://www.usgs.gov/humancapital/a-zlist.html>

Q: Can you define what formal training is for Pathways?

Answer: Formal training may be in-class room training or online training, interactive training, attendee at a conference as long as it advances the goals and competencies outlined in the Recent Graduates or Presidential Management Fellows Individual Development Plan (IDP). Mandatory annual training such as information security and ethics training does not count toward these hours.

Q: Could you provide the URL for the HR A-Z index?

Answer: Yes. <http://www.usgs.gov/humancapital/a-zlist.html>

Q: Is the requirement for an Individual Development Plan (IDP) something new under Pathways?

Answer: The IDP is not new to Pathways, but was not required for the previous Student Career program (SCEP). An IDP is required under the Pathways Internship for appointments lasting longer than 12 weeks, and for the Recent Graduates and Presidential Management Fellows programs. Completing an IDP should be a joint effort between the manager and the employee. The manager and employee work together to develop realistic goals and activities to achieve them. The IDP should be kept with the immediate supervisor. The Human Resources does not need a copy of the IDP. A copy of the IDP form and guidance on the IDP is available on the Office of Employee Development (OED) website at http://www.usgs.gov/humancapital/ecd/ecd_idphome.html

