

Best Practices for Internships as a Component of Graduate Archival Education¹

Adapted from Best Practices in Public History, Public History Internships. Prepared by the National Council on Public History Curriculum and Training Committee, 2008

BACKGROUND

Professional internships allow graduate students to gain new insights into the nature of archival practice by engaging in meaningful work under the mentorship of experienced and knowledgeable archives professionals. Professional internships provide students with a unique opportunity to connect the skills and knowledge gained in their archives education with practical experience supervised by a professional archivist. For the majority of archives positions available, practical experience is a requirement.

When graduate internships are offered for academic credit, archives internships must be designed with clear educational objectives. Onsite archivist supervisors need to collaborate with teaching faculty to evaluate graduate student interns appropriately and to determine whether students have met the course's educational objectives. Onsite work may be accompanied by additional assignments as required by the faculty supervisor.

Although internships are first and foremost intended to educate archives graduate students, internships are partnerships among students, archives programs, and the sites hosting interns. No two internships will be exactly alike, so it is vital that faculty, students, and onsite staff who supervise interns take the time to discuss the project and to establish clear expectations about what will take place during an internship. It is the responsibility of the academic program to ensure that both students and supervisors at internship sites are well informed about what is expected from a successful internship. Once an internship begins, it is vital for student interns, faculty members, and onsite supervisors to maintain open lines of communication to address any problems that arise. Successful internships balance the needs and goals of all partners.

The Society of American Archivists has defined a set of overarching recommendations common to most good programs, and academic programs can use these to shape internships that meet their unique missions and pedagogical goals. SAA recommends that individual institutions and programs use these best practices, in addition to SAA's *Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies*, to develop their own specific policies for internships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Nature of Work: Internships engage graduate students in professional-level work that supplements formal archival education and core knowledge, strengthens or introduces new skills, encourages collaboration and teamwork, and helps to develop their understanding of how archival theories and methods are applied in practice. Such work is performed under the supervision of experienced archives professionals willing to share their knowledge and insights with student interns. An internship must include enough hours to ensure that the intern can complete a project and gain exposure to various aspects of archival management. Interns should also be oriented to institutional operations. Internship projects are designed so that a student can later refer to his or her discrete role and accomplishment when applying for

employment. In many cases, this means that internship projects are designed so that students can produce a complete work product--a digitized or processed collection, a finding aid, or an exhibit--from beginning to end. Alternatively, a project could be designed so that an intern plays a significant role on a group project, such as drafting a preservation plan for a set of maps to be digitized or creating metadata guidelines for an Omeka implementation. Interns should be allowed to use works generated during their internship as part of a portfolio or job application.

Compensation for Student Internships: Given the value of archives work and the skills possessed by archives graduate students, interns should receive compensation (in the form of academic credit or a stipend) for their work commensurate with the qualifications required for the position. Graduate internships without any form of compensation should be rare to avoid devaluing the professional nature of archival work. Institutions that cannot offer compensation will ensure all other recommended best practices are met.

Internship Agreements: Before a professional internship begins, the student intern, the onsite supervisor, and the faculty internship supervisor must agree to a clear set of guidelines for the internship. These specify the conditions of employment, including the educational objectives of the internship, the expected final work product of the internship, and the evaluation criteria that will be used by both the faculty member and the onsite supervisor. This agreement may take the form of informal letters of agreement or a more formal written contract signed by all parties, but the parameters of the internship are in writing and approved by all parties before the internship begins. Archives programs may also find it useful to provide both students and host sites with online or printed information explaining the role of internships within their curriculums and the academic requirements for student internships.

Onsite Supervisors: Interns are supervised at their internship sites by individuals with sufficient training or experience in archives to ensure that interns are exposed to methods and procedures consistent with the best practices in the field. Onsite intern supervisors will meet regularly with interns to answer questions, provide feedback on their work, and mentor them. Intern supervisors and their institutions also have a responsibility to ensure a professional and safe work environment.

Faculty Internship Supervisors: Internships must be supervised by faculty members who are knowledgeable about the field of archives and who can appropriately evaluate all of the components of an internship.

Regular Communication: Regular contact between the intern's faculty supervisor, the intern, and the onsite supervisor must be maintained during the internship. If possible, hosting sites provide student interns with opportunities to share their experiences with others and to reflect on how the internship experience connects to their coursework and issues of archival theory and practice. This can take many forms, including face-to-face meetings or virtual discussions.

Evaluation: All internships include evaluation methods that allow institutions to determine whether students have met the educational objectives of the internship. Evaluation methods and procedures are clearly defined at the outset of the internship and include written input from onsite supervisors. Interns are given an opportunity to discuss their performance and experiences with both the academic advisor and the onsite supervisor at the end of the

internship. After completion of an internship, both students and onsite internship supervisors evaluate the internship experience to identify areas for future improvement. The conclusions of these surveys can be used to enhance future internship experiences and to identify sites that may not be appropriate for hosting future interns.

Interns Do Not Replace Professional Staff: Work performed by interns must be educational and provide students with hands-on experience. The work of interns must not replace the work of professional staff.

Post-Graduate Internships: SAA recognizes some professionals may investigate additional post-graduate internships, in addition to any sponsored by archives graduate programs, and recommends participants receive fair compensation. Institutions should also follow these best practices to the best of their ability.

ⁱ Graduate archival education refers to MA/MLS/MLIS programs, with a minimum number of credit hours dedicated to an archives specialization. SAA Directory of Archival Education: <http://www2.archivists.org/dae>.

For additional information, please see:

Bastian, Jeannette A. and Donna Webber. *Archival Internships: A Guide for Faculty, Supervisors, and Students*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2008.

Society of American Archivists: *Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies*: <http://www2.archivists.org/gpas/curriculum>

U.S. Department of Labor. *Internship Programs Under The Fair Labor Standards Act*. <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.pdf>