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Originate, Create, Renovate, and Innovate: Leading Revolution in the Academic Library

Archival Internships: Creating Real World Learning Beyond the Classroom

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Abstract

This purpose of this article is to show the value of archival internships in Special Collections and University Archives, Wichita State University Libraries. Internships create real world learning opportunities for students in the graduate Public History Program who have taken the introduction to archives course. Students gain valuable hands-on experience processing some or all of a manuscript collection under the supervision and mentoring of the Curator of Special Collections. The repository benefits by addressing its backlog of unprocessed materials. In a time of staffing shortages, it is essential to devise innovative practices that solve the problem of managing work flow without compromising standards. The elements of setting up and implementing a successful archival internship are also applicable to library internships in academic or public libraries.

Long regarded as an essential part of professional archival training, internships have become, in a time of staffing shortages, an indispensable requirement for students and repositories alike. Students master new subject matter and skills, analyze archival issues as they come up in a real world setting and make judgments to respond to them, find appropriate mentors and advisors, and learn to think like archivists. Site supervisors complete work and reduce their backlog of unprocessed manuscripts and other records, provide professional service by contributing to the mentoring and learning of new archivists, identify potential employees, and gain new knowledge and perspectives.

For the past year and a half, Special Collections and University Archives at Wichita State University Libraries has worked with a number of archival interns. These internships are planned as a semester long unpaid apprenticeship done near the completion of the student's academic work. Internships provide students an opportunity to demonstrate and refine skills they acquired in the Introduction to Archives course (History 705) and enable students to gain experience working with more substantial collections that present greater complexity of size and organization. This article outlines the requirements and procedures for designing and implementing successful internships, including identification of the goals, objectives and responsibilities in the internship plan, consultations with the supervisor, and completion of a performance evaluation at the end by the supervisor. The experiences have also provided strategies for improvement of the process on the part of both the student and the supervisor.

Based on more than five years' experience supervising and mentoring archival internships as an archivist, curator and professor at three institutions, the author identifies the following elements to be essential for a productive internship:

- (1) the establishment of clear and realizable goals and objectives identified at the outset
- (2) prior consultation and planning with the site supervisor for specific projects
- (3) arranging in advance for academic approval with the appropriate administrators
- (4) frequent consultations between intern and supervisor throughout the internship
- (5) flexibility for needed adjustments to revise goals, objectives or projects
- (6) submission of a student self-reflection paper to the site supervisor and the student's academic program director

and

- (7) completion of the student performance evaluation by the site supervisor followed up with a discussion between the site supervisor and the intern.

The following sample form¹ designed for internships in Special Collections and University Archives outlines these elements:

Archival Internship Requirements, Procedures and Evaluation

Internship Description

The internship in Special Collections and University Archives, Wichita State University Libraries, is designed as real world, hands-on archival work experience under the site supervision and mentoring of Dr. Lorraine Madway, Curator of Special Collections and University Archivist. Students also benefit from the additional expertise of and training provided by Library Assistant Mary Nelson.

The student must do the following to prepare for the internship: 1) identify learning objectives; 2) plan the internship with the site supervisor; and 3) review and get approval of the internship from the academic program director, Dr. Jay Price, Director of the Public History Program. The site supervisor and the

¹ This form is adapted from the one used by Emporia's School of Library and Information Management (SLIM) for¹ the Archives Studies Certificate Program. The author of this article, a member of the national faculty of SLIM, gratefully acknowledges permission from SLIM to use and cite this form. Additional templates for various kinds of forms are provided in Bastian and Webber (2008), 88-103.

program director will work together to guide the student throughout the experience and ensure that the student's learning objectives are met. At the end of the internship, the student will submit a paper critique activities, lessons learned, and accomplishments to the program director and a copy to the site supervisor. The course is graded by the program director in conjunction with evaluative feedback from the site supervisor.

The internship requires at least six hours of work a week throughout an entire semester. Given the professional nature of the work expected in an internship, a set number of hours cannot be explicitly stated and approximately 100 hours is provided as a guideline for a three-credit hour internship. It is expected that the student, in conjunction with the site supervisor, will estimate an appropriately balanced work load to enable the student significant exposure to the work of a professional archivist.

The internship is planned as a work experience activity near the completion of the student's academic work and allows students to demonstrate proficiency in skills, to extend skills, or to address skill deficiencies. Part of each student's responsibility is to recognize skills that need to be improved and knowledge or expertise that needs to be acquired, and actively to address fulfilling these needs.

Internship Goals

- 1) To provide professional orientation and skills development appropriate for a student through a supervised field experience in Special Collections and University Archives, WSU Libraries.
- 2) To broaden the student's perspective for improved assimilation and synthesis of general principles and concepts related to the archival profession, particularly in the areas of arrangements and description; reference services and access; and preservation and protection. To acquaint the student with the mission, administrative organization, policies and procedures, resources and services, and clientele of a particular archival repository.
- 3) To expose the student to working contacts with individual professional archivists; to facilitate the development of professional attitudes, service ethics, and work habits; to acquaint the student with different points of view and a variety of strategies for dealing with archival needs (e.g. collecting, preserving, and providing access to archival materials) and managerial problems and issues.
- 4) To provide the student with the experience of professional evaluation, in terms of: general education, professional knowledge and competence, ability to work with others, and diligence in the accomplishment of assigned tasks.
- 5) To provide the student an opportunity for self-reflection and self-evaluation of his or her performance during the internship experience.

Responsibilities

The student

During the internship, the student will:

- 1) Complete each of the required activities on the student checklist.
- 2) Act professionally and with courtesy, taking special care to abide by the policies and rules of Special Collections and University Archives, WSU Libraries.
- 3) Complete all work as planned or revised.

The site supervisor

During the internship, the site supervisor will:

- 1) Review and edit the Internship Plan with the student and, if necessary, to revise it.
- 2) Enable the student to put into practice techniques learned in courses and to observe principles of good practice in a work setting.
- 3) Provide professional feedback where appropriate.
- 4) At the end of the internship, complete the Student Performance Evaluation Form to indicate competence and performance in each activity area.

Internship Plan

Name _____ Date _____

Mailing address _____

E-mail address _____ Telephone number _____

Timeframe:

Starting date _____

Projected completion date _____

Site supervisor:

Name _____

Title _____

Organization _____

Telephone number _____

E-mail address _____

Statement of objectives: What do you want to learn during this internship? Discuss these objectives in advance with your site supervisor and list them below:

Objective 1

Objective 2

Objective 3

Assignment:

Signatures:

Student _____ Date _____

Site supervisor _____ Date _____

Student Checklist

Use this checklist to make sure that you have completed the prerequisite steps for an archival internship in Special Collections and University Archives:

Yes, I have

- Received formal acceptance into the WSU Graduate Public History Program ____
- Reviewed my coursework with the Curator of Special Collections who is the site supervisor to make sure that I am ready for this experience ____
- Identified the educational objectives and professional goals that this internship will help me achieve ____
- Determined a workable schedule in consultation with the staff of Special Collections to complete at least six hours of work per week for an entire semester ____
- Completed the necessary paperwork required by the Public History Program, WSU Department of History ____
- Worked with the Curator to create an internship plan that sets forth goals and objectives, a projected timeline, and activities ____
- Completed and submitted a copy of the internship paper to the Curator ____

Student Performance Evaluation Form

To be completed by the site supervisor at the end of the internship.
Evaluation of the student's performance during the internship, including strengths and opportunities for improvement, quality of work, and probability for success in the profession:

Name of internship student _____

Name of site supervisor _____

Title _____

Organization _____

Mailing address _____

E-mail address _____

Internship start date _____ Ending date _____

Signature of student _____ Date _____

Signature of site supervisor _____ Date _____

Intellectual/Professional qualifications

	Excellent	Above Average	Average	Fair	Poor	No criteria to evaluate	N/A
General Knowledge							
Use of English: Spoken							
Use of English: Written							
Foreign Language Proficiency							
Other							

Comments:

Knowledge of archival resources							
Administrative ability/leadership							
Technological expertise							
Professional Ability							
Service Ethic							
Ability to work with patrons							
Ability to work with staff							

Comments:

Personal Qualifications:

	Excellent	Above Average	Average	Fair	Poor	No criteria to evaluate	N/A
Integrity							
Poise							
Emotional Stability							
Industry/Thoroughness							
Enthusiasm/Initiative							
Accuracy							
Dependability							
Judgment							
Adaptability							
Imagination/Creativity							
Other							

Comments:

The preceding form encompasses the seven elements for a productive internship outlined earlier. The overall goals, the first element of a productive internship, are set forth in the first section of the form, the Internship Description, and the specific objectives are identified in the section outlining the Internship Plan. The second, fourth and fifth elements, prior consultation and planning; frequent consultations throughout the internship; and flexibility to revise goals, objectives or projects, are covered in the Internship Description and reiterated in the section on the site supervisor's responsibilities. The third and sixth elements, the requirement for making arrangements in advance for academic approval and the submission of a student self-reflection paper, are covered in both the Internship Description and the Student Checklist sections. The seventh element, the completion of the student performance evaluation by the site supervisor, is covered in the section on the site supervisor's responsibilities and in the Student Performance Evaluation Form.

The first internship undertaken in Special Collections and University Archives from April-July 2009 was done for the required supervised practicum (LI 873) for the Archives Studies Certificate Program at Emporia's School of Library and Information Management which requires 120 hours of practicum training during the course of a semester. The intern reprocessed much of the F. Leroy Hill Papers, MS 95-03, <http://specialcollections.wichita.edu/collections/ms/2010-01/2010-1-a.html>. This is a large manuscript collection of sixty linear feet that includes the diaries, correspondence, business documents, personal papers, scrapbooks, artifacts, photographs, and blueprints of F. Leroy Hill, a noted engineer, businessman, entrepreneur, and civic leader.

The collection was originally processed in 1995, and in need of major reprocessing since recent examination showed that the physical arrangement did not match the description in the finding aid, which runs to eighty-five pages. The intern made great progress and reprocessed more than sixteen linear feet of archival material. This is a substantial piece of work for a 120-hour internship. In order to complete this work, the intern worked efficiently and thoroughly to acquaint herself with the collection and to identify and correct the problems in the arrangement of the materials. This practicum presented the intern with a real-world opportunity to fix the mistakes of others, a necessary task of an archive, and to help provide high quality work to both the archive and the researchers who make frequent use of this collection.

The next two internships were done during the semester of Spring 2010 for the required internship in the Graduate Public History Program at Wichita State University. One intern processed the Wichita Bibliophiles Collection, MS 2010-01, <http://specialcollections.wichita.edu/collections/ms/2010-01/2010-1-a.html>. The Bibliophiles Collection documents the cultural and social activities of a venerable literary club of male book collectors that has been in continuous existence since 1932. The collection is comprised of more than six linear feet of invitations, meeting minutes, membership lists, photographs, correspondence, book collecting materials, members' papers presented at monthly meetings, and ephemera. This collection presented the intern with the challenge of identifying the appropriate series for the series in

order to best capture the functional activities of this active yet informally run organization. The artistic and imaginative materials in this collection were a constant source of temptation and delight to both intern and supervisor alike. Since the intern had previously processed a collection of a local artist and calligrapher during the introduction to archives course, she was able to draw on her knowledge of printing and calligraphy to process the Bibliophiles Collection and to benefit from the experience by enhancing her knowledge in these areas.

The other intern processed the Janet Owen Laws Papers, MS 2010-02, <http://specialcollections.wichita.edu/collections/ms/2010-02/2010-2-a.html>. This collection documents the re-emergence of a vibrant Native American culture throughout North America, particularly in Kansas and the Southwest in the last half of the twentieth century. The Laws collection also includes the memoirs of Janet and those of her husband Leonard; Janet's correspondence with a friend; and images of her and Leonard's artwork, handicrafts and sculpture. The substantial collection is comprised of fifteen linear feet of scrapbooks, images, newspaper clippings, travel guides, museum brochures, publications, and other writings. This collection provided the intern with the challenges of not only identifying comprehensive yet concise series to best capture the functional activities of an avid and eclectic collector but also implementing preservation decisions for the extensive publication materials. The collection appealed to the intern's interest in Native American history which he is focusing on in his graduate work. Since the intern had previously processed a small collection with various gaps in the introduction to archive course, this internship provided him the opposite and more frequent challenge of devising processing strategies for large amounts of material.

Currently an archival intern is helping to process part of the recently acquired Gordon Parks Papers. The intern is identifying and researching unpublished writings and film scripts in the collection. Processing unpublished material is one of the greatest challenges archivists must grapple with in processing literary and artistic collections. The intern is drawing on his own extensive skills and talents as a writer, critic, and teacher of English composition and writing.

Archival internships are a worthwhile way for archives to mentor aspiring archivists at the same time that they address the backlog of unprocessed manuscripts. Archivists provide service to their profession by helping to train the next generation of archivists as they find creative and constructive ways to respond to staffing reductions which may continue for some time. Internships provide supervisors opportunities to teach processing skills and strategies that will ultimately produce high quality work for their institutions. At the recent KLA-CULS Fall Conference in October 2010 at Emporia State University, two archival interns remarked in their presentations that they improved their processing skills immeasurably during their internships. They also acknowledged that learning from their mistakes was one of the most beneficial outcomes of their experiences. Their final work products show that archival internships fulfill one of the main goals of professional training: to learn to think like archivists. Internships also provide opportunities for supervisors in turn to learn from interns to refine their teaching and training strategies and to gain fresh perspectives on a profession that is always evolving. Archival internships bear out the centuries old rabbinic teaching: "Much have I learned from my teachers, more from my colleagues, and most from my students" (*Babylonian Talmud: Taanit, 7a*).

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