

Internship and Public History Training

Introduction

As a process, public history fundamentally relies on developing public access, public communication, and public participation. In order to do so, it is crucial to learn, propose and practice specific skills and practices. Public history training therefore develops solid historical methodology, knowledge of historiography, but also specific skills to communicate and make history more “public”. Many public history university training programs have been offering internships as ways to learn and practice public history outside universities.

The [International Federation for Public History](#) recently created a [Curriculum and Training Committee](#) that fosters international discussion on public history training and teaching. As part of the committee, we organized an online discussion in December 2020 with three guests to discuss the perspectives of faculty, students, and site supervisors on internship. You can watch the video [here](#). Anna Adamek (Director of the Curatorial Division at Ingenium – Canada's Museums of Science and Innovation), Phil Scarpino (Director, Graduate Program in Public History, IUPUI, USA), and Sarah Roller (former graduate student, Trinity College Dublin’s Master of Public History, Ireland). The online discussion was followed by Q&A with members in attendance. This discussion coupled with feedback from the Curriculum and Training committee led to this list of issues, points, and reflection on internship in public history. The document is by no means an ultimate list of best practices, but should instead be read as an invitation to consider specific steps and perspectives in creating, designing, and evaluating internships. We also want to later propose this document in other languages (Spanish, Portuguese, French, German.... *etc.*).

Thomas Cauvin (President of the International Federation for Public History)

1) Why do internships?

“Internships are an important part of public history education that allow students to gain new insights into the nature of public history practice by engaging in meaningful work under the mentorship of experienced and knowledgeable public history professionals. Successful internships provide students with work experience combined with structured opportunities to reflect on their activities and connect their practical experience with the skills and knowledge gained in their public history training.” (NCPH’s best practices for internship)

Collecting your testimonies as former/current public history students, internship supervisors.... Share your experience in the comments.....

2) Different types of internship

The type, length, and organization of internships vary much from institutions to institutions and from countries to countries - according to regulation. Internships are very often (but not always) undertaken during the summer or during university breaks as the latter allow several continuous weeks of practice on site. The length of internship varies from a few weeks to sometimes year-long experiences (IUPUI proposes [10-month long paid internships](#)). Likewise, the tasks that the interns perform during internship vary greatly (collection management, education policy, archival work, historic preservation, audio-visual production...etc.). Due to the COVID-19 situation, the number of digital and remote internships has increased in the past month. You can find some resources [here](#).

3) How to set up partnerships with institutions?

A discussion between the student, the faculty advisor, and site supervisor. “While internships are first and foremost intended to educate public history students, it is important for programs to

remember that internships are partnerships between students, public history programs, and the sites hosting interns.” (NCPH’s best practices for internship)

A) Preparing the ground (find partnering institutions for internships)

It is crucial to prepare internships well ahead to ensure successful experiences.

- Academic Supervisor

-Supervisor should discuss with students and identify needs, types of internships, and future career choices to better frame their internship.

-Supervisor should clarify with the students the length and type of requested internship, the possible financial help, and the requirements to get credits.

-Some programs link internships to a course (with reading, discussion, and possible additional assignments).

-Supervising internship is time-managing. Some programmes have created internship supervisor positions, or have created a course so that academic supervisor’s work is acknowledged.

-Paid internships preferred. The context and the law vary much from country to country (and from university to university), but there is a strong current support for paid-internship. Securing paid-internship often requires long discussion and preparation from the academic supervisor with site partners. Cost-sharing with host institutions can be a solution but it requires a long process of discussion, trust, and explanation.

-Supervisor should have a steady pool of community connections that (s)he maintains throughout the years.

- Hosting institution perspective / roles

-Students should not be afraid to call a host institution.

-Students have to make it very clear to the employer about their skills and the things they want to learn. Students could contact the person of the institution who is working in the area they want their internship to be in.

- Student’s perspectives / roles

-Students should discuss with their academic advisors about the type of internship, skills, projects, and institutions that could better serve their training.

-Students equally need to be open to new placements if their original idea doesn’t work out.

- Students can send emails and call institutions (asking for possible opportunities) that they have identified. Students may introduce themselves as public history students.
- Internship experiences should also connect to broader issues and topics in public history.

B) Arranging the internship

- Academic perspective / roles

- It is important that the academic supervisor be in contact with the site of internship.
- A first meeting can be arranged between the host, the student and the academic supervisor to set clear expectations and goals.
- Establishing and signing an Internship agreement (Memorandum of Understanding) is highly desirable
- Contacting and discussing with program' Alumni can help find (paid) internships.
- Keeping track (database) of past internships is important.

- Hosting institution perspective / roles

- It is important to establish a long term partnership between the university and the host institution. We often have to plan way ahead of the actual starting date of the internship to ensure that we have the budget, the office space, and time to supervise. It is part of our workplanning which may happen up to 6 months before the year in which the student joins us.
- Having a Memorandum of Understanding with a university allows us to plan better.
- What the university may call an internship, the host institution may call a summer job, a fellowship, a cooperation, a practicum – to access a variety of funding opportunities and budgets.
- Regarding payment: we assess the resources that we contribute versus the work that an intern completes for us. We generally do not pay undergrads, because they require lots of effort and time from our part, but we do pay graduates since they bring a lot to our institution.
- Having a formal interview process with the student is important.

- Student's perspectives / roles

- It is important for students to meet their supervisors (academic and site).
- We need to play an active role in the internship and identify where we want to be and to be proactive in arranging things with our supervisors.

-Work with all supervisors to improve / add to their job materials (resumes, cover letters, etc) to best reflect their internship experience

4) Skills and task during internship

- Academic perspective / roles

-Supervisors should be in regular communication with interns and their site supervisor.

-It is important for students to explore professional fields of public history practice.

-Students should go through a diversity of experiences.

-The intern should be considered as a member of the staff and participate in regular meetings, events, and other tasks performed/attended by employees.

- Hosting institution perspective / roles

-The values of the institution must be respected and it has to be taken seriously by students. For example the students must adhere to health and safety rules, respect gender equality, and follow the protocol for working with specific communities.

-Interns should as much as possible attend events, conferences, and meetings

-Interns get prepared for their career. The responsibility of the host institution should go beyond 8-10 weeks of internship. We cover the cost of conference participation for our interns, write references, provide letters of support for grants, nominate them for student awards, etc.

-Interns are assigned to a curator but work closely with an assistant curator through which they can see the institutional organization.

- Student's perspectives / roles

-To expect a successful internship, students should know what they want to achieve and identify this early on with the host institution.

-It is important that students really engage and contribute to the host institution.

-Students should not be afraid to ask help and learn from experienced staff.

-Learning communication skills is part of the overall internship.

-Students should enquire and alert their supervisor about possible issues.

-A successful internship may sometimes lead to hiring opportunities in the host institution.

5) Evaluation

- Academic perspective / roles

-Evaluation and requirement should be clarified with the student at the beginning.

-Various forms of evaluation exist. Usually, students write and submit an internship report in which they explain the tasks they performed, the projects they worked on, and the skills they learn.

-Supervisor may ask intermediary reports, weekly logs of activities. Intermediary submission may help identify/foresee problems.

-Other evaluations take the shape of portfolio and/or blog posts in which students develop specific points.

-Opportunities for self-reflective work at the end of the internship can be useful to connect the internship with broader issues in public history.

-Some programs propose weekly discussions between all interns; they can share their perspectives, their work and projects.

-Some programs organize events, symposiums (public or not, with or without host institutions) in which students present their experiences as interns.

- Hosting institution perspective / roles

-Site supervisors usually fill and submit evaluation forms on the interns' work.

-Site supervisor can have an exit-meeting with interns to collect their feedback.

- Student's perspectives / roles

-Evaluation reports are also opportunities for students to provide feedback regarding their experiences, the successful activities - and some possible issues - during their internship.

6) Context of Coronavirus

-Cultural sites - that represent a large portion of internship opportunities - have greatly suffered from the pandemics and lockdown policy. It is unfortunately not surprising that the current situation affects internships.

- Many institutions are undergoing budget cuts and staff lay-out. It makes internship opportunities more difficult.

- Remote / online internship.

-Not being on-site can make the learning of some public history practices more difficult.

-Remote internship can actually result in a more diverse (student can work from anywhere) range of interns for the hosting institution.

-Hybrid internship (1 day on site, the rest done remotely) can be a solution

7) Additional Resources (in progress)

-IFPH Curriculum and Training Committee

-[NCPH Best Practices: Public History Internships](#)

-AASLH Webinar: **Stepping Into the Profession**

<https://learn.aaslh.org/p/webinar-enhancing-internships-2021jan>

-Literature....