BitCuratorEdu Guidelines for Hosting Remote Internships

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Overview

These guidelines are aimed at information professionals who wish to provide remote internship opportunities to students who seek practical experience in digital curation and preservation. Although the need for remote internships has recently increased due to COVID-19, hopefully these guidelines will also support ongoing efforts to offer remote internships for students and host institutions that are geographically separated.

These guidelines do not provide specific administrative details on working with an intern's home institution to arrange for compensation or school credit, which must be handled on a school-by-school basis. Many graduate programs in information science and archival studies have details about their field experience/practicum/internship programs on their websites, or this information can be obtained from a school administrator.

These guidelines have been developed within the [BitCuratorEdu project](#) (IMLS, 2019-2022) in response to a need we identified for documented norms for remote

internships in digital curation and preservation - they are not exhaustive. In addition to the guidelines explicitly stated here, we recommend that all prospective host sites and supervisors of interns read and follow the guidelines in *"Do Better" -Love(,) Us*, which pertain to creating ethical contingent positions in digital library work. The Society of American Archivists' *Best Practices for Internships as a Component of Graduate Archival Education* also contain valuable recommendations about the nature of work appropriate for interns and the role of an intern supervisor.

Although the term "intern" is used in this document, these guidelines may also apply to the supervision of graduate student assistants or students completing archives field experiences. The term "intern" is being used to indicate a contingent library worker who is using this work experience to supplement a course of study in library or information science.

Guidelines for Host Sites and Supervisors

Projects

Developing Projects and Work Plans

It is helpful to start and maintain a running list of potential internship projects, for both in-person and remote interns. Good internship projects can be accomplished within a finite period of time (ranging from a couple of weeks to several months), have measurable learning outcomes, and produce concrete deliverables. Keep track of this information in a list or spreadsheet.

For remote internships, consider which projects are best suited to an online-only environment, and be sensitive to limitations in the intern's computing access and/or mend these through the provision of equipment. Depending on computing resources and local policies, an intern may or may not be able to transfer digital material from storage media; however, many will be able to update finding aids or perform metadata tasks in a digital repository. Make sure that the intern will be able to access the systems that they need for their work - for example, talk to IT about remote access to your ArchivesSpace instance. The SAA Accessibility & Disability Section Steering Committee has developed a very helpful list of potential projects for remote archives workers, including student workers, in their *Archivists at home* guidance document. Further examples of remote internship projects are

provided in our [case study from the Archives and Special Collections at Seton Hall University](#).

Learning outcomes are measurable statements that tell learners what they will be able to do after a class or project. When writing learning outcomes, use active, measurable verbs (i.e., *explain*, *interpret*, *differentiate*, rather than *know* or *understand*). Writing learning outcomes for potential internship projects will not only help you match up prospective interns with projects, it will also help interns articulate the concepts that they are learning in class discussions and during job interviews. For more information about writing learning outcomes, see this [guide from the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning at Indiana University Bloomington](#).

It is also important for internship projects to have concrete, measurable deliverables, in addition to the educational value that is measured in learning outcomes. An in-person archival processing internship, for example, might have an extent measurement that could be added to a resume or CV. A web archiving project might result in a measurable number of sites crawled and described. Some projects, especially in a remote environment, might be more focused on research and information-gathering - make sure that these projects result in a concrete report or written recommendations that the intern can use or cite as a writing sample.

Also consider the difficulty level of potential internship projects. Some projects might be more suited to beginning archivists, while others might be reserved for an intern in their third semester of library school who is looking for a more complex "capstone" project. The difficulty level of a project may also impact the amount of supervision that is needed. Consider beforehand how much time you will have to mentor a student through a particular project.

With a list of potential projects in hand, you can talk to a prospective intern about their own interests and background. If they are a new student, it might make sense to start them off with a short project that introduces basic concepts and gets them comfortable with the tools and terminology. It can also be helpful to ask them to find a few job listings that they are interested in, and go through these listings together in a mentorship session. They can look at the required and recommended qualifications, identify the experience that they need, and you can work together to select a project that gives them some of this desired experience. Create a work plan

with your intern, listing projects, deliverables, learning outcomes, timeline, and points of contact. [See an internship work plan template here](#).

When planning to host a remote internship, you should anticipate spending even more structured time with that intern than you might during an in-person internship. Orienting interns to workflows, procedures, and technologies will take longer in a remote environment. Plan to spend a significant amount of time troubleshooting with your intern, taking advantage of screen-sharing platforms when possible. Since you will not be working in the same office as the intern, there will be fewer casual opportunities to check in on progress and ask if there are any questions, so you will need to schedule regular check-ins.

Onboarding and Offboarding

Make sure that you have a comprehensive onboarding process for new interns. Especially if you plan to host more interns in the future, it is helpful to have a checklist for the logistics needed to prepare both the intern and the institution for the internship. Rather than assume the intern is familiar with a certain operating system, productivity and collaboration tools, and other IT systems at your institution, ask what their comfort level is with the systems they will use, and plan for additional training as necessary. [See an example onboarding checklist here](#).

Offboarding is also important. A remote offboarding might include a final meeting with the intern and supervisor to communicate what worked well and what didn't, requesting feedback that can be incorporated into future iterations of remote internships. Asking the intern to prepare a final report or project handoff document is helpful for ensuring a smooth transition. Interns might be interested in giving a final presentation of their work to the wider organization, and you might consider hosting a group sendoff or other thoughtful ways to say goodbye virtually. Take this time to also confirm logistics (e.g., return of laptop and peripherals, if provided, and termination of access to IT systems). [See an example offboarding checklist here.](#)

Mentorship

Determining Capacity

Mentorship is an active process. Taking in an intern for any project, whether remote or in person, requires setting aside time to answer questions, review work, and provide advice to these career-seeking archivists. Before you decide to take on an

internship project, determine the time commitment required and make sure that this time and mentorship commitment is understood and supported by your own supervisor. This number will vary based on your own project management style, the scope and complexity of your project, and the needs of your intern, and may require trial and error and experience to determine. One suggestion we found is to set aside one hour of mentorship time for every ten hours of the intern's work time. Another was to determine a percentage of your time to allocate to the internship project. As discussed in [Developing Projects and Work Plans](above) (above), supervising a remote internship is likely to take even more time than supervising an intern in-person - you will need to factor in additional time to manage technical logistics, remote access, and orienting the intern to working in an online environment.

Depending on the size of your work unit and the degree to which you and your intern depend on coworkers to complete the project, you may decide to arrange distributed check ins; for example, a 30-minute project management check-in with the internship manager paired with specific task based check ins with other coworkers who can share the education burden or even provide a better education than the intern manager could based on their deeper knowledge of specific parts of the organization's workflows.

Finally, people entering the LIS and GLAM job markets for the first time are experiencing unprecedented anxiety about both the job search and the way that the world is changing around them that might in turn affect their job prospects and the industry they have joined. Intern managers should be mindful and empathetic of this, and students graduating in 2020-2022 may benefit greatly from some extra attention to help them navigate a pandemic and post-pandemic job market. If you have some experience managing interns in the past, you may want to consider adding additional mentorship time into your plans over the next couple of years to accommodate the unprecedented needs of current students.

Checking In Remotely

During check-ins, use screen-sharing and/or take control of your intern's screen to walk through questions and obstacles (both of these features are available in a Zoom pro account and other video conferencing platforms). Wherever possible, incorporate additional lessons into this time. What context is the intern missing about the institution or the work due to the nature of a time-limited scoped remote internship? How does the work the intern is doing fit in with the rest of the

department's output? Make sure you share this with them so they understand why they are doing what they're doing. It's important for them to understand the institutional context for their own work if they are to talk about this work in a future job interview.

Provide context of current and historical practice wherever appropriate. If the student is reprocessing something, you can talk about historic shifts in archival practice from enthusiasts and historians comprising the majority of employees caring for archives to the requirement of coursework in library science and archives specifically, which has meant shifts in practice over time. Furthermore, there is a broad context for reprocessing and redescription based on cultural changes and trends toward anti-racist archival practices. What examples from your own or other institutions illustrate why the work your intern is doing is important?

Do not assume anything about an intern's prior knowledge, even if you are very familiar with their graduate program or know what classes they have taken. You might take advantage of the onboarding process to learn about their prior knowledge and experience, through informal conversation or even through a more formal mechanism like a self-assessment. Likewise, have intentional discussions throughout the internship to gauge your intern's experience (or lack thereof) with different archival concepts, making sure to acknowledge that everyone has knowledge gaps, regardless of their skill level or experience!

Your intern's biggest knowledge gap will likely be what working in an actual archive is like. Seeking ways to highlight where theory breaks down in practice, while still approaching issues and materials with care, having compassion for past practitioners, and being resourceful and solutions-based about institutional hurdles is going to be the greatest benefit you can provide to your intern. For example, most LIS students are taught MPLP (More Product, Less Process) processing techniques, but there are ways in which this has not yet translated well to born-digital processing. How does the material you're working with or your institutional context shape decisions around using different standards or best practices, such as MPLP? Standards for born-digital preservation may not always match available funding - when and why do you cut corners in practice, and what *would* you do if you had different resources?

Also try to model decision-making wherever possible. For example, if you decide to do a full forensic extraction of data from a disk rather than a logical copy of the file structure, why did you do that? How is this approach supported by archival theory

over another option? This also helps to make connections between theory and reality and show how available resources and institutional context affect decision-making. All of these conversations are essential knowledge for archivists entering the workforce.

Different organizations and departments have different cultures around inviting interns to staff meetings and other spaces that incorporate them into the organization's community. We recommend creating opportunities for interns to observe or even participate in these activities, even if just once during their internship, to give them a well-rounded idea of what it's like to work in your organization. Whether you are able to integrate the intern this deeply or not, there are many ways to give them a taste of what is going on outside of their project bubble. Can you include a learning session on your team's culture as part of onboarding? Can you pull the intern in on a (non-sensitive) call with a donor who is working on transferring their digital materials? Can you bring them on to a vendor call about a product or repository that you are considering? Be creative and look out for opportunities for your intern to observe what your day to day work is like, especially if it is something unusual!

Consider opportunities for regular communications and updates directly from the intern. For example, a bi-weekly newsletter or other brief post sent to the organization (or teams that interact with the intern) that details what they've been working on and what's up next. This is a way for the intern to hone important communication skills while promoting their work to a broader audience.

Ensure that your intern understands your own knowledge is limited and encourage them to get experience at many different places under many different managers early in their career. No matter how skilled you are or how long you've been at this, you can't know everything, so it's important for interns to understand that it takes many different people with different knowledge and strengths to preserve archives across the board. Imposter syndrome affects many young or new archivists, and we need to take the pressure off of burgeoning digital archivists to know how to do "everything digital." Make sure that your intern understands the scope of the profession and the impossibility of knowing everything, despite many intimidating unicorn job descriptions out there that suggest otherwise.

At the end of your internship, offer the opportunity to provide a resume workshop. Review your intern's materials in advance and let them know that you will be more critical than usual in order to address as many things as possible. Mock interviews

and learning sessions on job searching and the application process may also be helpful. You may even consider giving the intern an opportunity to present on their project to the organization in a group meeting, which is a great venue for practicing presenting and engaging with the wider organization.

Resources

Case Study

Seton Hall Internship Case Study: This case study provides examples of two internships completed in the Archives and Special Collections at Seton Hall University during the COVID-19 pandemic. One internship was fully remote, and the other was a hybrid remote/in-person internship.

Templates

Internship work plan template
Sample intern onboarding checklist
Sample intern offboarding checklist

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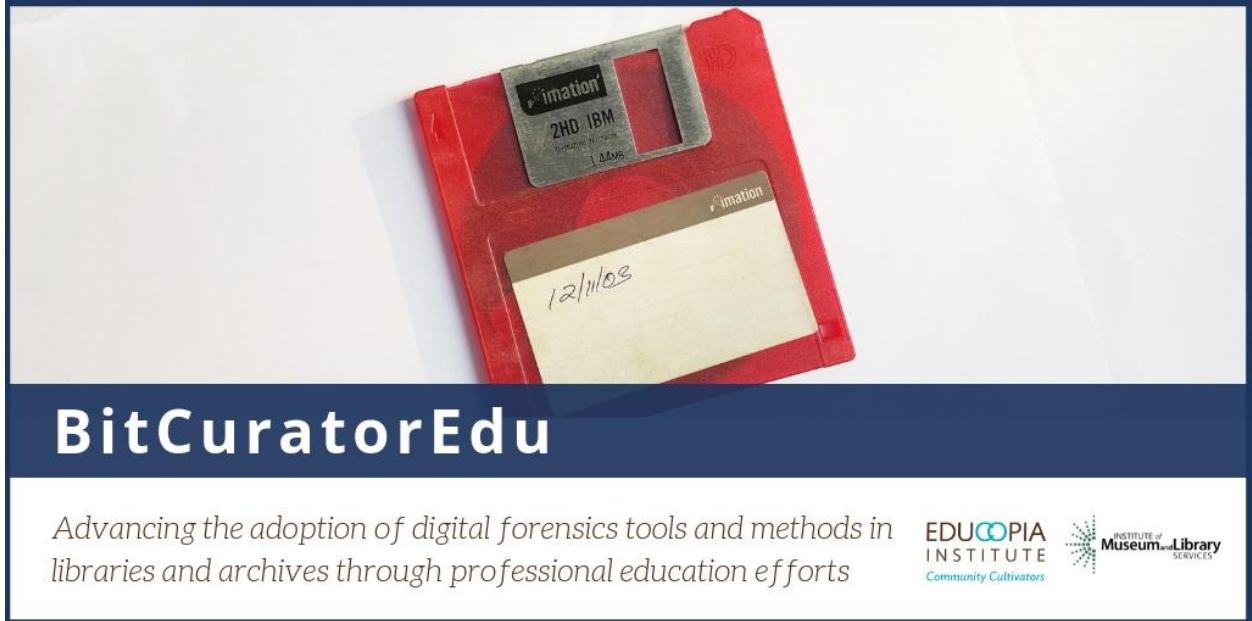
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The [BitCuratorEdu project](#) is a three-year effort (2018-2021) funded by the [Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)](#) to study and advance the adoption of digital forensics tools and methods in libraries and archives through professional education efforts. This project is a partnership between [Educopia Institute](#) and the [School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#), along with the [Council of State Archivists (CoSA)](#) and several Masters-level programs in library and information science.