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Recommended Citation

Flota, B., Lane, M., & Liu, J. (2022). "What If You Don't Have a Library School?" Ethical Considerations for a Summer Internship at an Academic Library. In A. Hartsell-Gundy, K. Duckett, & S. Morris (Eds.), Learning in action: Designing successful graduate student work experiences in academic libraries (pp. 5-19). ACRL. https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/letfspubs/209/

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CHAPTER 1

"What If You Don't Have a Library School?"

Ethical Considerations for a Summer Internship at an Academic Library

Brian Flota, Mark Lane, and Juhong Christie Liu

Introduction

Enabling professional working experiences for library and information science (LIS) graduate students is always rewarding. With this chapter, the authors will reflect on the operation, collaborative processes, and results of an academic library's summer internship program. Ethical aspects related to ensuring intern pay, along with individual goal-based learning in a real workplace and the integrity of professional status, will provide insights for others looking to plan or implement similar programs.



In 2014, James Madison University (JMU) Libraries created the Alternative Summer Break Academic Library Internship (ASB). There is no LIS graduate program in Virginia. Geographically, the closest to JMU, which is located in Harrisonburg, Virginia, are Catholic University and University of Maryland. This means that our out-of-the-way academic library does not have a history of working with library school students. Conceived of as an ethically-based program in response to unpaid LIS internships, ASB provides a stipend and on-campus housing to a current or recently graduated LIS graduate student for six weeks. Interns are hired at the university rank of "instructional faculty nonteaching" and work with libraries faculty and staff to tailor a project according to their career and education goals. As part of the program, these graduate interns conduct informational interviews, attend faculty meetings and job talks, and present a scholarly talk about their project during the last week of their internship. ASB also provides JMU faculty and staff with supervisory and mentorship experience.

This chapter will present a case study that reveals how this ethical approach to the ASB program has unfolded after four iterations (2016–2019) and what serious work remains to be done. In addition to describing in full the components of the program, this essay will highlight scholarly collaborations between ASB committee members and interns. It will also acknowledge areas where the ASB program needs improvement. For example, budget constraints have prevented higher pay and a cohort model. Other concerns include a lack of diversity among interns and summertime scheduling when there is a lack of university activity and faculty presence on campus.

The Beginnings of the Alternative Summer Break Program

The impetus for ASB grew out of conversations over the course of several months in 2013 and 2014 between several JMU librarians, among them a former director of collections, a former associate dean, and a humanities librarian. These discussions focused on the best internship experiences they had as they pursued professional careers within academic librarianship and the strengths that united those experiences. They identified four core qualities: (1) interesting, high-level projects; (2) meetings with staff across many sectors of the host organization; (3) being treated as equals despite their relative lack of experience in the field; and (4) the duration of the internship being long enough to complete a long-term project but not so long that it necessitated uprooting one's life to complete it. Recognizing that JMU Libraries, based in a fairly rural part of Virginia, did not have a library and information science program and that the nearest ones were a two-and-a-half-hour drive away, they felt that hosting such a program would be beneficial to the organization; the innovations within the JMU Libraries and its

educational technology units would also offer interns a one-of-a-kind perspective. They also recognized that to make it worth a prospective intern's time to travel all the way to rural Virginia for such an experience, the internship should provide a stipend and free housing.

Therefore, when a grant program with the JMU Libraries endowment fund was instituted in 2014, these librarians proposed the idea for the Alternative Summer Break Academic Library Internship. Soon after the grant application was successfully approved, a job ad was placed with the intention of recruiting the first ASB intern for the summer of 2015. However, it did not go as planned. That first cycle was riddled with problems. The ad went out too late. Once the ad was out, similar university library internship programs also had ads out, limiting the ASB's applicant pool. Additionally, the building that housed students during the summer at JMU was being razed (as another new building was being constructed). When first offers were made, housing could not be provided, though money was offered to prospective interns to find their own housing during the internship. This was ultimately the undoing of the initial year of the ASB program, as each prospective intern cited the lack of housing as the reason why they chose not to accept the offer.

After failing to hire an intern for the summer of 2015, the ASB committee had an entire year to plan to hire an intern for the following summer. The full year of planning had the benefit of learning lessons from the failure of the first search, including the following:

- Begin planning for the following year as soon as possible.
- Ensure funding is (still) available.
- Secure on-campus housing as soon as possible.
- Place a job ad and conduct phone interviews with candidates much earlier in the calendar year.
- Solicit libraries faculty and staff for long-term projects as soon as possible. Once these objectives were met, the committee began circulating a job ad in late January 2016. After a greater number of applications were received, phone interviews began in March. Following the interviews, we successfully recruited our first intern, a graduate student from the University of Michigan's School of Information.

Ethical Foundations of ASB

The role of interns in the workplace used to be unclear. During the time when the ASB program was being conceived, the exploitative practice of unpaid internships *finally* began receiving attention in the mainstream press. In a 2012 piece for *The Atlantic*, business writer Derek Thompson asks, "If unpaid internships are the key to better jobs and bigger salaries, should we be concerned about the millions of lower-class students who can't afford to work for free?" Laura Franta-Abdalla, writer for the online magazine *Mic* in 2014, points out several

reasons why unpaid internships are bad, most notably that they "are shaped by privilege," offer "no protection against harassment or discrimination," and are often "actually ILLEGAL." The same concerns are also expressed by Madeleine Schwartz in a 2013 piece for *Dissent*: "The intern's obscurity and uncertainty characterize a labor force that has grown more contingent, relying on part-time, unstable, and insecure work." Even *Forbes*, the generally pro-business magazine, featured a 2014 article by Rachel Burger, "Why Your Unpaid Internship Makes You Less Employable," in which she points out, "Those with unpaid internships tended to take lower-paying jobs than those with no internship experience whatsoever (\$35,721 and \$37,087, respectively). Students with paid internships far outpaced their peers with an average \$51,930 salary."

While the diminished earning power of unpaid internships is a definite drawback, the underlying exploitative nature of them—disproportionately affecting women, LGBTQ+, and BIPOC interns as well as those on the lower end of socioeconomic spectrum and first-generation college (and graduate) students—is the main reason they should be avoided at all costs. As Angela Galvan astutely notes, "Only students with access to money can afford to take an unpaid internship. Galleries, libraries, archives, and museums throughout the United States continue exploiting unpaid labor, [ensuring] the pool of well-qualified academic librarians skews white and middle class." These conversations, marking a shift in the post–Great Recession employment landscape, led to the philosophy that paid internships are not only vital but also a social justice practice within the strictures of late capitalism. These conceptualizations were the bases of setting up and operating the ASB program described in this chapter.

Logistics

Prior to the inaugural internship in June 2016, the ASB committee had to clear numerous hurdles to ensure a smooth, functional, and rewarding six-week experience. The biggest lesson from the scholarship on internships was housing for interns. A collaboration with JMU Conference Services made it possible to secure a room with the grant-allocated funds.

The job ads and hiring process concerned ethics of inclusion and diversity. The committee met with the human resources (HR) coordinator to review ethics in the interview and hiring process, from placing the job ad to screening applications, conducting phone interviews, making an offer to a candidate, and closing out the search once the offer has been accepted. This process included regular training on diversity, inclusion, and access for equal employment opportunity as part of institutional human resources recruitment. This process followed the same hiring and onboarding procedures used for hiring full-time or part-time instructors at the university. One ethical consideration was the resources and opportunities available to the prospective interns at their LIS program. For instance, whether

we should pick the most qualified applicant or a promising one (sometimes both at once) who may not have access to professional, academic-level library work experience in their program reflected our ethical evaluation in the process.

It was vitally important for ASB that potential projects would assist one of the libraries units *and address the needs of our intern*. This was to ensure the equity of professional respect to the intern, which is closely associated with the value of an intern's learning experience in a real job setting in an academic library. For example, our first intern worked with Special Collections to migrate archival metadata to ArchivesSpace. The project was initially to focus on oral history transcription, but was reprioritized when the intern's needs and goals were taken into account. This established a precedent for ASB that allowed interns to have significant input into shaping their projects and internship experiences.

To provide a seamless onboarding experience for the ASB intern, we also learned that other factors needed to be considered. These related to human resources procedures, employee ID, access to physical and virtual spaces, and more. The committee found that completing tasks such as the following prior to the intern's arrival to campus ensured more efficient use of time for the six-week internship and removed unnecessary barriers for the intern to be fully immersed in the academic library settings:

- Information about the campus and surrounding community, including options for dining, recreation, and local areas of interest.
- JMU e-ID for email and other institutional accounts. Starting this process early, if possible, ensures there is not a delay in accessing campus systems.
- JMU identification card for access to libraries workspaces and other campus buildings.
- Keys to appropriate workspaces.
- Office workspace including appropriate furniture and a JMU-owned computer on which the main work of the project can be accomplished.
- Packing list based on what is and is not provided by on campus housing (e.g., JMU Conference Services provides a linen service for a nominal fee that is included in the ASB budget).
- Parking pass.
- Proper payroll classification to ensure intern gets paid in a timely manner and secures faculty status for the duration of the internship.

Having all of these things in place is of vital importance to facilitate a positive, productive, respecting and being respected, and less stressful internship experience.

Structure

The ASB was conceived as a full-time experience consisting of 200 hours of paid work (\$10 per hour) over a period of six weeks during the summer. The

majority of the internship, 160 hours, was focused on a major project, like the one mentioned in the previous section, chosen in consultation with the intern prior to beginning the internship. The remaining forty hours were devoted to professional development activities that sought to immerse the intern into the organizational culture of the libraries and university as well as help them pursue further interests aligned with their LIS studies. These activities included approximately twenty informational interviews with faculty and staff from across numerous units within the libraries, attendance at faculty meetings, and attendance at job search presentations. Interns prepared for informational interviews ahead of time and were encouraged to use these opportunities to ask questions about the profession and others' perspectives on their own career paths in libraries and academia. Interns were also asked to give a presentation to the libraries during the final week of their internship. In these presentations, interns provided an overview of their project and major accomplishments, discussed highlights of their learning from the professional development activities, and answered questions from libraries faculty and staff in attendance.

As the ASB internship program has developed, roles and responsibilities have been shaped related to its effective and ongoing administration within the organization. The following list represents the core individuals associated with running the six-week internship each year. This does not include natural collaborators such as human resources, accounts payable, facilities, and others that must be included in decision-making for new hires, on-campus housing, and such.

- Coordinating committee. Oversees overall timeline of the internship and ensures deadlines are met. Coordinates recruiting, hiring, and onboarding processes including securing on-campus housing. Conducts onboarding and exit interviews with interns.
- *Intern*. Completes 200 total hours of internship over six weeks. One hundred sixty hours are devoted to a major project selected in consultation with the coordinating committee, and the remaining forty hours are spent completing professional development activities.
- *Internship mentor.* Coordinates forty hours of professional development activities in consultation with intern. Meets regularly with intern throughout the six weeks to check in on how the experience is going and provides assistance as needed. Coordinates with intern's home institution for internship credit as applicable.
- Project supervisor. Supervises intern in 160 hours of professional work in the supervisor's area of expertise. Consults with internship mentor on progress.

We learned early on that focusing on one higher-level project sustained over the course of the six weeks was beneficial to the intern and proved to be a natural way to immerse them as professional colleagues into the organizational culture of a particular department and working team. Projects are intentionally rotated through libraries units (including Academic Engagement, Innovation Services, and Scholarly Resources and Technology) in order to vary the types of experiences offered with ASB as well as to involve a variety of faculty and staff in the program and provide supervision and mentorship experiences for employees. Major ASB projects have included creating online learning materials for first-year students, creating online learning and promotional materials for maker-spaces, and creating and editing metadata for a collection of Black comic books held in Special Collections. These are outlined in further detail below.

ASB Projects

The following examples highlight major projects that ASB interns have worked on and the libraries departments that have hosted them. The first ASB intern in 2016 worked with Special Collections to implement the ArchivesSpace information management system. This involved migrating EAD records from a legacy system and using Python scripts to normalize metadata. This intern said the "experience prepared me to work in another academic library in Virginia."

In 2017, the intern worked with liaison librarians in Research and Education Services to create a learning module for a personal wellness course to teach students how to evaluate online health information. The intern also contributed to research with a JMU librarian and created a video about digital object identifiers (DOIs) for the campus community. These resources are still in use by JMU Libraries.

In 2018, the intern worked with the libraries' makerspaces. The libraries support creative lab spaces across the JMU campus. The intern created and edited LibGuides and other instructional materials for the makerspaces and also helped develop programming for students and faculty in these spaces.

In 2019, the internship was overseen by a project team representing several areas of the libraries. The intern cataloged a Black comic book collection held in JMU Special Collections.⁷ This included adding and editing holdings on a custom-built Omeka site, searching LC name authorities for content creators, handling the physical comics, and working closely with the humanities librarian and director of metadata strategies on descriptive metadata and related collection decisions. The intern noted, "Perhaps the biggest thing I've gained from this internship is the knowledge that I want to work in an academic or research library or institution."

Scholarly Collaboration

Another intentional component of ASB is to collaborate with current and past interns on scholarly work that can help boost their early careers, especially if

they wish to continue working in academic libraries. After the third iteration, all previous ASB committee members, interns, and project leaders collaborated on a poster about the internship program, which was presented at the 2019 ACRL Conference in Cleveland, Ohio.⁹ Additionally, the fourth intern collaborated with her project leader and one of the authors of this chapter to have an essay about their project accepted for publication in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*.¹⁰ This type of work shows the ASB committee's as well as the libraries' commitment to the interns as emerging professionals and peers in the field and serves to build their network of connections as they continue to professionalize.

Professional Experience for Faculty and Staff

ASB has provided leadership, mentorship, and managerial experience for libraries faculty and staff who have participated in the program. This is an added ethical consideration of the program, that is, mentoring and collaborating with a novice colleague (who might not become a long-term colleague) with equity considerations for engagement opportunities across all libraries employee classifications. For example, not all the coordinating committee members had previous supervision experience within the libraries. Managing the intern's professional development schedule, developing project workflows, problem solving, and conducting weekly meetings with interns provided on-the-job training for these acting supervisors. Additionally, many faculty and staff across the libraries participated in the intern's professional development activities, most notably in one-on-one informational interviews. These are beneficial to the intern, but also provide an opportunity for libraries staff to practice inclusive mentorship and thoughtfully engage with their own professional career paths.

While ASB is primarily focused on making sure interns learn on-the-job skills from the library's faculty and staff, one of the great things about it is that faculty and staff also learn from the interns. Workplace-based learning helps students develop practical skills for completing functional projects and nurtures soft skills when they collaborate with professional librarians in academic libraries. Depending on the project, interns may also have interdisciplinary experience. Furthermore, through programs like ASB, library faculty and staff can learn along with interns while the interns apply the knowledge they are gaining in their LIS curricula. For example, in Lynda Holyoak's qualitative study, she found that mentoring and supervision support was critical to interns' learning satisfaction. Maggie Gallup Kopp also argues that effective LIS internship programs should be well designed with curriculum-oriented assignments and assessment measures, and in alignment with "high-impact practices," which and in alignment with

1) are effortful; 2) help students build substantive relationships; 3) help students engage across differences; 4) provide students with rich feedback; 5) help students apply and test what they are learning in new situations; and 6) provide opportunities for students to reflect on the people they are becoming.¹²

ASB, through a combination of project-based learning, collaborative scholarship, and advocacy by libraries faculty and staff on behalf of the interns, realized or approximated these high-impact practices to ideally benefit those who participated.

New Direction for ASB

During the middle of the last iteration of the ASB, a new dean began working at JMU Libraries. One of her goals for her first year was to "Actively explore funding possibilities and best practices for instituting a residency program meant to welcome and support new librarians and library staff of color or members of other under-represented groups."13 When the dean learned about ASB, she proposed some ambitious new goals for the program, from increasing the number of interns from one to two or three to connecting it to JMU's Furious Flower Poetry Center, the first academic center for Black poetry in the United States, and to JMU Libraries' Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Grant Furious Flowerings: Developing a Partnership Model for Digital Library Support" of a Living Center for Black Poetry."14 Given the need for increased funding to support up to three interns, scaling up ASB from a one-intern model, orchestrating the logistics of such a transition, determining what projects interns could be involved with to serve both the libraries and the Furious Flower Poetry Center, and coordinating with new potential partners from the libraries' Council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, it was decided to put ASB on pause for summer 2020. This pause provided the ASB committee with a chance to reflect on past successes but also to reassess ASB's ethical foundations and identify areas of improvement.

Ethical Reconsiderations

When looking back at the ethical foundations that guided the first four years of ASB, four major areas of improvement were identified to be addressed:

- better compensating our interns
- making a stronger structural commitment to hiring librarians of color
- transitioning the internship to a cohort model
- reconsidering when the internship can take place

While no internship experience is perfect, moving forward, paying attention to these four ethical considerations will make ASB more beneficial to the interns, to the libraries, and to the profession.

Compensation for our interns remains a primary concern. Given the initial budget for the internship (approximately \$4,000 for room and board and a stipend), the intern was to make approximately \$10 per hour over the course of their six-week experience (or \$2,000 for 200 hours of work). The per-hour pay was similar to what graduate assistants were making at the time, and the amount was marginally higher than Virginia's minimum wage (\$7.25 per hour). Prior to the first iteration of ASB, Chen and Shen, in a 2012 article, studied the perception of internships by students from twenty universities. Although in a different disciplinary area (hospitality management), the statistics prediction model of using structural equation modeling (SEM) and a reliable instrument did disclose that interns were concerned about compensation according to legal stipulations, reasonable compensation, and compensation comparable to faculty.¹⁵ However, after four years of ASB, we were unable to offer higher pay. Given the nationwide move by states to increase their minimum wages to anywhere from \$15 to \$20 per hour, the original \$10 per hour rate appears both exploitative and uncompetitive by comparison. A revised version of the internship program must strive to pay the intern much more than the current hourly rate. This may be achieved through funding from sources like external donors who are looking for impact on LIS graduate curriculum, or grants for projects related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In planning for future internship programs in academic libraries, considerations can include purposeful job ad distribution to underrepresented ethnic groups as well as connections through faculty from underrepresented ethnic groups. Librarianship, in general, is a fairly homogenized profession; academic librarianship is even more homogenous. According to a study by the AFL-CIO, 79 percent of all librarians are female. The report also notes, "The librarian profession suffers from a persistent lack of racial and ethnic diversity that shows few signs of abating," with 77 percent of all librarians identifying as white. 16 The numbers are even more stark in academic librarianship. Hui-Fen Chang's oft-cited study shows that, as of 2012, 86 percent of academic librarians identify as white, compared to 1981, when that number was 90 percent, suggesting that in the last forty years, not much has changed.¹⁷ Compared to the demographic shifts in the United States' population over that period of time, the relative stagnation of these numbers is deplorable. Of our four interns, each identified as female, and only one identified as a person of color. The recruitment of interns from diverse cultural backgrounds can lead to stronger bonds between underrepresented students, faculty, and staff when they visit the libraries. As Jaeger, Subramaniam, Jones, and Bertot explain, "Admitting more diverse MLS students will not work

if people from underserved, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups do not see people like themselves among library professionals and LIS program faculty, staff, and students." These efforts can also help with efforts to decolonize collections and cataloging systems, which tend to privilege Anglo-European, Judeo-Christian, straight, male, cisgender content that has been long entrenched in libraries, content clearly unreflective of the country's shifting demographics.

To date, ASB has had only one intern at a time during each of its six-week iterations, as the funding and logistics enabled the initial implementation. 19 From adult learning perspectives, a cohort model will provide community and peer support that come from a similar and shared background and context.²⁰ With the individual knowledge bases and developed perspectives of the interns interacting in a professional working environment, self-directed learning will be optimized in the context of work-based learning and learning-based work. This social capital can be mobilized through a cohort model. As the authors of Developing a Residency Program: A Practical Guide for Librarians point out, "A possible benefit to cohort groups is shared experience and sense of community, where residents learn, work, and grow professionally together."21 As academic libraries transition into more integrative innovation and exert more influence in teaching, research, and community-based practice across the university, gaining capacity through co-constructive projects is a direction that can draw from the strength of ideas such as social constructivism.²² Transitioning the internship to a cohort model will draw from the benefits of social constructivism and communities of practice with a group of individuals of similar experience and educational background in library science.²³ These peers, along with mentors and workplace colleagues, will form a community of collective inquiry when working together on a project. This was also a lesson learned from the last iteration of ASB involving the creation of metadata for the Black comic book collection.

Something else to consider is the variable of time. While summer (which is reflected in the name of the program) is a great time for the libraries to catch up on projects because fewer students are on campus, this time of year can also create a conundrum. Summer makes it challenging for ASB projects to intersect with areas of interest such as public services or in-class instruction. While it is easier for project managers to lead a project while not also caught in the throes of the fall and spring semesters, summertime does limit the opportunities available to interns with interests in these areas. Reconsidering when the internship can take place may help to achieve curriculum-related goals as well as bolster the experiential learning aspects of the internships.²⁴

Conclusion

JMU's Alternative Summer Break Academic Library Internship began as an idea for connecting LIS graduate students with positive, productive work experiences

in an academic library where they would be treated as colleagues and develop professional relationships with their peers. Over time, ASB developed its model to more closely align project and professional development outcomes with the goals and career aspirations of prospective interns. Four interns have successfully completed ASB to date, and all of them continue to work in LIS fields, citing the internship as a foundational experience in their graduate studies and preparation for entering the job market. For example, one former intern says, "I've been able to bring the skills and the open mind I gained at JMU to my current position," while another exclaims, "Every experience from my internship has proved useful."25 ASB has proved to be a positive experience for interns, librarians, and others involved in the program since its inception, and connections have continued beyond internships through continued scholarly collaboration, job references, and similar professional networking. Many areas of the program can and should be improved, and it is our hope that exploring these areas in the future will continue to frame ASB in an ethical perspective and ground our internships with meaning and purpose.

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