University of Nebraska at Omaha

DigitalCommons@UNO

Digital Collections Internships at the University of Nebraska at Omaha

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Virtual Digital Collections Internships at the University of Nebraska at Omaha

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CRISS LIBRARY

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Good afternoon, I'm Wendy Guerra, I use she/her pronouns and I'm the Digital Initiatives Archivist at the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Criss Library. In my position there, I host student interns along with my colleagues in the Archives and Special Collections department. My focus today will be on virtual internships, but I will also share some hybrid work that I've done. I'll get us started today giving you some background on UNO's history of hosting interns, how the formalized program came to be, and how things are going now that we've been doing it for a few years. I'll also share some specific experiences along with lessons learned and key takeaways.

UNO Internship Program

- Unsustainable ad hoc approach
- Ethically conscious internship program design
- Choose your own adventure: processing, outreach, digital initiatives
  - https://www.unomaha.edu/criss-library/archives-and-special-collections/internship-program.php

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☐ UNO has an undergraduate library science program, but does not offer a Master of Library Science degree. The archives and Special Collections department has hosted students from UNO's own library science program along with graduate level interns from other schools' online programs for years. It was only in 2021 though that my colleagues and I formalized the program with a focus on intentionally designed internships. Coming out of the pandemic times, we had all had these casual conversations about how the rather random nature of the interns applying and working with us up to that point often resulted in workloads doubling or tripling without enough preparation, and this minimized our ability to plan projects that specifically were designed to benefit the students and us. We felt that that approach was unsustainable and we wanted to offer a better experience for our hosted students while also making the experience better for ourselves.

☐ Repeatedly during our work on internship program design, the concept of ethically conscious internships came up. As we all know, in the profession for the past several years, the topics of archival labor, unpaid student labor, invisible labor etc. have been common discussion points, and we tried hard to integrate conscious thought about those topics into our framework. As such, we prefer or even require to host students who are completing an internship or

practicum for course credit, as we cannot afford to pay them. It's not great that we can't pay them, but it's where we are and we are working with what we can.
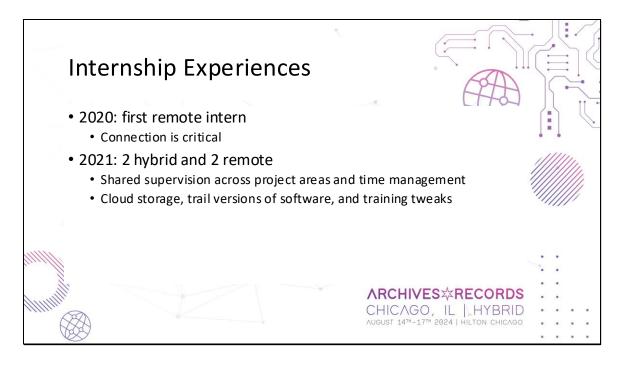
☐ So, part of the internship experience at UNO is the formal application process! Applying for jobs is hard and takes practice. Applying for the internship is a little bit of practice, as we require a resume and cover letter for the benefit of our applicants and also so we have as full a picture to complement the form application too.

☐ When students are filling out the application, they have the first opportunity to express what they are interested in. Sort of a choose your own adventure approach! UNO offers three main project areas, covering processing, outreach, and digital initiatives. Typically, processing internships are in-person, outreach can be done in hybrid style, and digital initiatives has mostly been virtual only with a couple instances of hybrid work. Our application lists types of projects/tasks that are associated with each main project, and depending on the number of hours an intern needs/wants, they can select a single area or multiple. I've included the URL to our internship page if you're interested in checking things out in more detail or if you know someone who needs an internship!

UNO Internship Program

- Student agency but mutually beneficial projects
- Learning plan to ensure well-rounded experience
- Virtual internships meeting students where they are
- Opportunity for professional experience while carrying on day to day lives

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☐ We very much want students to have a sense of agency when selecting projects, but we do have to balance that with the need to focus on projects and tasks that serve the needs and priorities of department. We aim to design internships that are mutually beneficial while ensuring that interns can see and feel how their work makes a difference.

☐ Interns at UNO have a learning plan with objectives that guides their work, there is a bit of required reading depending on each intern's strengths and coursework history, they complete informational interviews with folks from around the library in various departments to ensure a well-rounded experience, and complete an exit interview along with a final presentation to the department on what they learned/liked and accomplished in their time with us. The exit interview is really helpful for supervisors to know what works and what could be improved upon; we've gotten good feedback! And the presentation is good practice for future conferences!

☐ Now, that you have that contextual information, I'll shift a bit to focus on the virtual aspect of an internship. As could be expected, my colleagues' and my experiences with internships earlier in our careers certainly influenced our internship framework. I completed four internships prior to completing my MLIS. My degree was completed entirely online, and also I worked full-time.

Coordinating a schedule to allow for that was very difficult. There were periods just went from one thing to the next, while I fit my internship hours in during "standard reading room hours of 9-5."

- ☐ I greatly valued my internships, but also felt some frustration at the opportunities that I could never take advantage of due to my inability to relocate and do unpaid labor while taking time away from my paying job. With that in mind, when I had the ability to design an internship, I wanted to make sure that I provided opportunity to meet folks where they were. Wherever they might be, working whatever hours they needed to for whatever reason.

- ☐ I know that not all of us have this flexibility, so I think it is very important that if you can offer such an internship opportunity, that you try! In my experience folks appreciate being able to gain that exceptionally critical work experience in the field while allowing them to carry on with their day to day lives as needed.

Internship Experiences

- 2020: first remote intern
  - Connection is critical
- 2021: 2 hybrid and 2 remote
  - Shared supervision across project areas and time management
  - Cloud storage, trail versions of software, and training tweaks

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- ☐ I'll now share some specifics examples of interns I've hosted along with a few lessons learned.
- ☐ I worked with my first remote intern in fall of 2020 just before we formalized the program; it was one of the reasons I knew I could offer students a better experience. Everyone was remote during this time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, communication was all done over email with one or two Zoom meetings. This obviously was a tough time for everyone, but the experience led to me to understand the critical need to connect with students in meaningful ways when the relationship is entirely remote.
- ☐ So the following year I worked with 4 interns, two were hybrid and 2 fully remote. At this time I was working onsite at UNO's Criss Library, so the hybrid interns were able to do digitization projects using our scanners, and installed software such as Oxygen XML editor and Adobe Suite while also doing remote work in the content management system we had at the time, a hosted instance of Islandora. The hybrid interns followed their learning plans and my colleagues and I gained experience in how much guidance can be needed to ensure that each project area was worked on for the appropriate amount of time. We sort of assumed some time management was happening that wasn't and the remote tasks ended up

consuming a lot more time than we intended. We learned the key need for continued check-ins and tracking of time in order to ensure a well-rounded experience.

☐ The remote interns I hosted were from opposite coasts, one at Louisiana State University and the other at the University of Washington. And mind you I was in NE. Each student had a job outside of their school responsibilities and I had to be creative in what I could offer them for projects that allowed flexible work schedules. Additionally, they didn't have access to the standard software that we use for most of our digital collections work, so I designed projects that utilized our SharePoint cloud storage and trial versions of our regular software. Fortunately, this allowed the students to get hands-on experience with digital object editing, metadata, and utilizing the backend of our CMS within a set number of hours. I intentionally connected over Zoom at least once a week and probably sent more email than they wanted; I wanted to ensure that they felt a part of the Archives even though they were in totally different time zones. Thanks to their work, we increased access to more issues of UNO's student newspaper, updated metadata for two university archives collections, and wrote item level descriptive metadata for a popular manuscript collection. I learned a lot from hosting these two students. I was able to tweak my processes to fit their needs while not increasing work for myself (beyond that which comes naturally with hosting an intern of course) and I got great feedback for what to continue for future interns. One such thing was the delivery of training material. Instead of just meeting over Zoom and showing the students how to do something via a shared screen, I also recorded the process with vocal instruction and shared the recordings for them to reference as needed. Overall, the experiences with these students left me feeling pretty confident that I could host a University of North Carolina Greensboro student who lived in the Netherlands when they applied last fall.

Internship Experiences

- 2023: 1 remote
  - Extra coordination
  - Personal technology shortcomings
  - Time zone differences
  - Communication expectations

☐ This intern is the last one I'll share about today. I approached things much the same as I had for my two previous remote interns, but encountered a few different complications. This internship was for a significantly greater number of hours than the previous two, so it took more of my time to coordinate. The main projects were more in-depth and I encountered for the first time, the issue of relying on a student's personal computer to complete the work. I shouldn't have been surprised by this; when I was in grad school all I used was a chrome book and would have had a difficult time finagling a work-around without spending money to create a workable setup. I learned that for future interns, I need to ask questions about their computer setup during the interview process. There just is no way around the need for certain computer capabilities when doing some types of remote work.

☐ This internship also provided the opportunity to demonstrate how differences in time-zones can really prevent the ability to flex if a planned project needs some alterations. Sometimes communication delays prevented progress simply due to when the student and I were able to email. This wouldn't stop me from hosting another intern with such a time difference, but I think I would ask for some parameters around communication expectations to help prevent any issues.

- Despite the unexpected issues we encountered, it was such a productive experience for both the intern and the department. The student was able to conduct research in our digital collections and create a timeline ahead of a university department anniversary, reformat two collections to reduce space usage in our CMS, and help begin migrating our student newspaper to a new platform. She got some great experience while also helping me move priority projects forward.

Key Takeaways

- Hosting virtual archives interns is completely possible!
- You might need to plan a bit more and tweak typical ways of doing things.
- Understanding technological needs is important, as is setting communication expectations.
- Value the intern and provide the opportunity for their growth!

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☐ To wrap up my portion of the presentation: I just want to reiterate some key takeaways.

○ Hosting virtual archives interns is completely feasible. I have heard nothing but positive feedback and appreciation for the opportunity I'm able to provide. Recognizing that student interns are people too and might need just as much flexibility as you need in your job can really help working towards meeting students where they are as we help train the next generation.

○ That said, I haven't said yes to everyone that's applied for a remote internship. I recognize that some people may apply just because it would fit their schedule, but I still expect interns to be a right for the role in terms of what experience they are seeking, what knowledge they already have, and what skills I can teach them.

○ To host virtual interns, you may need to do some additional planning and perhaps tweak the standard ways you would use software and train in-person interns. Having a clear understanding of the technological requirements to perform the virtual work is very important, and you'd need to communicate that to your intern applicants. You might have to adjust your expectations for communication, do some trial and error, and try again.

○ Lastly, doing what you can to make the virtual intern feel like they are part of

your institution and making sure they feel valued for their contributions is really critical.
- ○ Thank you!