



Backstory Vermont Internship Program

Program Overview for Historical Societies

The College of Arts and Sciences Internship Program, the University of Vermont History Department, the Center for Research on Vermont and the Vermont Historical Society have teamed up to provide a **semester-long internship at a local Vermont historical society** for a student in the College of Arts & Sciences.

Internships are a vital piece of a liberal arts education and the College of Arts and Sciences is committed to providing their students with a diverse range of experiential learning opportunities.

Information for Historical Societies:

Having an intern can be a wonderful and rewarding experience for both the organization and the intern. These students are on their way toward degrees in diverse fields related to history and/or collections management and will be able to fill a need within your historical society.

What can an intern do?

A college student in 2018 may be different than the college student that you remember. Students accepted into the Backstory: Vermont program are professional, eager, and well versed in many computer programs. In other words – they are ready to make your life easier.

As ‘technology natives’ these students have grown up figuring out how to do things on their own. If they don’t know how to do something, they will probably Google it first and ask you questions later. This means that constant supervision and in-person work time are not essential for a successful internship experience. (Especially if the internship is focused around a certain project that the student can do using their personal computer or the UVM library).

What is an internship?

An internship is an agreement between a student and a historical society that outlines intended outcomes and learning opportunities for both the student and the society.

The internship is intended to provide a service to the historical society. We want this to be a worthwhile experience for you! And in completing a project or task that you need doing, the intern will likewise gain a sense of accomplishment.

It is best if you have a particular project in mind, but you may discover that the intern has a particular interest or skill that you could take advantage of!

In turn, the historical society may learn something from the student! Because many of them are able to work with social media, websites or graphic design, they may be able to teach your employees how to set up and maintain digital practices that will increase interest in your historical work. Think about what you need as well as what an intern may need!

What does a historical society mentor do?

Each student in the Backstory: Vermont program will be enrolled for academic credit at UVM. This means that most of the reflective and personal analysis work will be done in class with their professor. But, each intern must also have a designated mentor at the historical society. This person will be able to verify the student's hours, review their work and provide assistance with the intern's project or task. This **does not** mean that the mentor is required to physically supervise the student's work, or sit with the student while they work unless detailed supervision is needed (in the case of delicate or rare artifacts or processes that need professional supervision).

We recognize that many small historical societies do not have a physical space or collection in which to work. If the student is working remotely on a project, the mentor will need to keep an eye on their hours and determine if the hours worked seem reasonable for the amount of work they produce. It is also important that the mentor keep in email/phone contact with the student throughout the internship and that the student complete some of their hours in-person.

The mentor **is not** responsible for teaching the student about the history of the area. The student should be able to research information themselves that pertains to the project they are working on.

But **you will** need to impart specific or technical knowledge that is required for the student to complete their work. For example, how to use your archival software, how to create a sturdy physical display or exhibit, how best to organize notes or information about objects, etc. The student should be learning how to work at a historical society. (See: 'What should a student get out of an internship?' below.)

What should a student get out of an internship?

The purpose of an internship is for the intern to gain valuable work experience, transferable skills, and practice producing work that matters in the real world.

Students in this program want to know what it is like working at a historical society. How do you organize your database? How do you enter information? How do you conceptualize a new exhibit? How do you choose a topic to focus on? How do you physically construct exhibits? How do you reach out to the community? These questions may seem like old hat, but they are brand new experiences for an intern.

Students are doing internships because they want to gain professional experience in a field that interests them. This means that just working with you and your team is a learning opportunity. How do you communicate? How are tasks prioritized? What processes could be streamlined? These are all opportunities for learning for a student who has not yet held a full-time job.

Likewise, students are also in want of transferable or “life” skills. Skills that they can carry with them no matter where they end up: punctuality, communication, organization, responsibility, etc.

Finally, as simple as it seems, offering your intern a letter of recommendation or helping them put their experience on their resume are both incredibly valuable outcomes of an internship.

Preparing for an Intern:

Preparation is essential to a successful internship. Thinking about what you want and what you may have to offer are both important steps. Here are some other things to consider:

Attracting an intern:

Consider providing a stipend, housing, or travel assistance to your intern. This can make your historical society more attractive to potential interns. Especially if they do not have access to a car and are living near Burlington.

If your society cannot offer any of these benefits, that’s ok! An interesting or engaging project can work just as well.

A well-defined project:

What can be done during the course of a 15 week semester? Students will work a minimum of 120 hours – which is 8-10 hours per week. This can be done all at once (one 8-hour day) or split between multiple days. Some students may want to work up to 240 hours over 15 weeks.

Some project examples from 2018:

- Scanning and organizing a large collection of town photos and then bringing the photos to elderly people in the community for identification.
- Creation of a newsletter (printed, at least 16 pages, bi-annual).
- Rehousing of a collection.
- Digitizing genealogical manuscripts or other ephemera.
- PastPerfect (or other catalogue) data input of a defined collection.
- Creation of an exhibit focusing on a specific element of historical life (ie. Music in 1925).
- Cataloguing and shelving a book collection.
- Creation of a tour through the museum including highlights of artifacts of note and then recording it for future tour guides.
- Creation and development of a social media presence, email newsletter and updated website.

Consider Department of Labor standards:

The U.S. Department of Labor has outlined six key criteria for determining trainee status:

- Interns cannot displace regular employees
- Interns are not guaranteed a job at the end of the internship (though you may decide to hire them at the conclusion of the experience)
- Interns are not entitled to wages during the internship (although they are allowed to earn wages)
- Interns must receive training from your organization, even if it somewhat impedes the work
- Interns must get hands-on experience with equipment and processes used in your industry
- Interns' training must primarily benefit them, not the organization.

For additional information regarding these standards, see the U.S. Department of Labor Fact Sheet #71

Creation of work plan:

At the beginning of the internship period, or even during the interview process if appropriate, students and their mentors should create a work plan that outlines the intended goals and outlines of the internship.

Consider the following questions:

- What is the project to be completed?
- What are the action steps toward completion?
- What does the student want to learn?
- How can that be incorporated into their work at the society?
- What skills (technical or transferable) will the student gain through this internship?
- What is the student's work schedule?
- Professional expectations?

The student may be required to submit this document to their professor, so make sure they have a copy!