

## Internships in Public History: Question

Dear fellow public history educators:

My colleagues and I are reviewing our program and we are curious how others handle giving credit for their internships.

We wanted to know if people prefer grading internships on a traditional letter grade basis, or if people prefer using a pass/no pass or credit/no credit system?

What are your feelings about the pros and cons of each?

Thank you in advance for your input!

Cherstin

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I'm not directly involved in coordinating internships, but I do know that we give letter grades. Grades are based on student presentations that they give to faculty and other students upon returning in the fall, detailed journals of their duties and accomplishments, and, most importantly, letters from their supervisors.

I think this system rewards those students who work the hardest to get the most out of their internship experience.

Will

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At the moment, we give a pass/fail grade based on a final reflective paper.

However, I would very much like to begin running my internships as the equivalent of a course, including readings, some class meetings, online discussion and a presentation. Such a change will move us away from the notion that my role is to "supervise" internships (which counts as departmental "service") and toward the recognition that internships are an essential part of training of future public historians. Therefore my role in them should be as a more active instructor.

When I am able to implement that change, I will likely begin giving a grade.

Denise

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We give pass/fail grades - but that's the Brown way! We've also made it into a real class, with writing and presentation requirements - a blog during the summer, and class meetings during the school year. You can see our guidelines at <http://proteus.brown.edu/jnbc/427>.

Steve  
[Steven Lubar <Steven\\_Lubar@brown.edu>](mailto:Steven_Lubar@brown.edu)

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I have experience helping out with the internship programs at University at Albany (my current position) and Rutgers.

At University at Albany we use the pass/no pass system. The grade is based on a supervisor's evaluation and a short paper written by the intern. Oversight is typically through email contact, short office drop-in visits, and email contact with intern supervisors. Our public history director Ivan Steen can answer more specific questions.

For an overview of our program, go to <http://www.albany.edu/history/pubhist.html>

At Rutgers we also graded interns pass/no pass. The oversight was a bit more stringent: the director Gary Saretzky and I met with each intern at least five times: once before the semester started to help choose an appropriate internship, a group meeting at the beginning of the semester,

an individual meeting on campus early in the semester, a site visit done halfway through the semester, and a final group meeting with interns' presentations. The grade was based on supervisor's evaluation, a short paper, and a presentation at the final meeting. We typically had 20 interns a semester, so our workload was high.

Rutgers allows students to choose between two kinds of internships. The public history internship is reserved for history majors and because of funding through the NJ Historical Commission, public history interns had to intern at historic sites within the state. A student can take only one public history internship. The second internship is a general internship, and it covers historic sites outside the state as well as non-history internships. Most of the general interns worked at the offices of state and federal elected officials, law offices, and the county public defender office. Students who have done a public history internship may take the general internship afterward if so desired.

For an overview of the Rutgers program go to  
[http://history.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=112&Itemid=157](http://history.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=112&Itemid=157)

I think the pass/no pass grade is appropriate, since internship sites and assignments vary widely. It would be hard to set up grading criteria applicable to all internships.

David Hochfelder  
University at Albany  
Albany, NY

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In the past I have used a three way contract: the student, the department (me) and the preceptor. Our students usually set out in the contract what is expected, and what deliverables, if any there will be (a museum collections policy, a collection inventory, an NRHP nomination, for example). In cases where there is no deliverable, we required a reflective essay. Our M.A. students have final exit interviews or oral exams with a grad committee of three faculty.

We give a letter grade. It tends to be A or resubmit

Best,  
Barbara R.  
[Barbara Rasmussen <Barbara.Rasmussen@mail.wvu.edu>](mailto:Barbara.Rasmussen@mail.wvu.edu)

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We give a traditional letter grade. The student's supervisor fills a form out on the intern's work, the students also do a paper for the supervising faculty member and the final project they did for the internship is also a part of the grade. The agency form and student paper are each worth 20% of the grade and the final project is worth 60%.

Donna M. DeBlasio  
Associate Professor, History and Applied History  
Director, Center for Applied History  
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Youngstown, OH

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We have two kinds of internships at the University at Albany, but in both cases we issue pass/fail grades. The first of these is available for both undergraduate and graduate credit, and requires students to work at a site for a minimum of eight hours a week. Those students are expected to report regularly to their faculty supervisor and to submit a brief paper at the conclusion of the internship. The on-site supervisor provides a written evaluation of the intern's performance. The second internship is one that is required of all students in the Graduate Program in Public History. This is a semester-long, full-time internship, on which the student is expected to have a specific project for which he or she is responsible. By the beginning of the internship, a formal "Internship Agreement" is drawn up, which is signed by the intern, the on-site supervisor, and the public history program director. Interns are expected to meet regularly with the faculty supervisor, and at the conclusion of the semester, they submit 10-20 page paper. More recently, we have permitted students to substitute a public presentation for the paper. The on-site supervisor submits a written evaluation. Our rationale for making this a pass/fail course is that interns work at very different places on very different projects, which are difficult--if not impossible--to compare. Moreover, the on-site supervisors are not used to assigning academic grades, and for the faculty supervisor to assign an academic grade based on the written evaluations is somewhat problematic. Lastly, I see no more reason to assign a grade for the internship than I do for a thesis, which we also do not grade.

Ivan

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Great question, and I've enjoyed the discussion, as well as learning about various internship approaches. We do have an "Internship Seminar" class that I teach, and I am attaching a link to the syllabus below. I believe that it really is important to connect the actual internship with related coursework and assignments, so that students emerge with a broader perspective on both their particular internship sites and the public history profession generally. We therefore do embed it within coursework, and also provide letter grades (similar to other courses in the program). Grades are based on class participation, reflective logs, supervisor evaluations, the final project, and presentations. Hope that helps, and happy to answer any additional questions.

<http://history.fas.nyu.edu/docs/IO/1614/WoshG572011.pdf>

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At the University of Northern Iowa we give letter grades based on the quality of the student's work as determined by the on-site supervisor's report, attendance at a bi-weekly forum, and a final reflective paper and log. Ivan mentioned that one option at Albany is that the intern completes a project for which the student is responsible. I am wondering how many others have such a defined project. While this has always been a goal; sometimes I find it difficult for the student to define such a project particularly in the field of collections management. Further, Denise made a good point about University administration's recognition of "supervising" student interns as service rather than teaching. I just finished reading the OAH/AHA/NCPH working group recommendations for Promotion and Tenure and this was an observation they had as well.

Interesting Discussion,

Joanne

Joanne Goldman  
Associate Professor, History  
Director, Public History Program  
University of Northern Iowa

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New Mexico State University counts the faculty member's work on internships as teaching.

Jeff Brown

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At Oklahoma State, where public history is a MA program, we assign a letter grade to internships. The grade is based on a reflective report submitted by the student at the end of the internship, and evaluation by the intern's supervisor at the host institution, and observational visits I make during the internship. Admittedly, the latter has not always been possible when internships occurred far from campus. One year, for example, I had an intern at the New Jersey SHPO and another at Edwards AFB in California.

I think the regular grade vs. pass/fail question an interesting one. I can see the reasoning behind pass/fail, especially if you consider it analogous to a thesis (although I would add that until this year, we assigned grades to theses and dissertations). At the same time, I wonder if the pass/fail grade discounts the internship on the transcript and perhaps in the eyes of future employers. After all, anything the equivalent of a "D" or better is a "pass." Frankly, I have no strong feelings either way and would welcome hearing more on the thinking of why institutions do one or the other.

While there is no internship seminar per se, I require a student doing a museum internship to have completed our Museum Studies course beforehand and for those in preservation to have taken Historic Preservation. This puts them in a position to make meaningful contribution during the internship.

I agree that ideally a student undertaking a project from start to finish is great. It just is not always possible. All our internships involve a Memorandum of Understanding between the host, the intern, and me as the student's instructor. A major component involves detailing the work to be done. The MOM thus allows me to determine whether the internship meaningfully contributes to the student's professional development.

Finally, I like to raise the issue of the timing in assigning a grade--be it a traditional letter grade or pass/fail. Almost always, my students do their internships during the summer and enroll for the internship course during the eight-week summer session, which ends at the end of July. This often is a week or two before the internship ends. I thus am faced with the choice of either assigning an incomplete or a final grade before the internship is technically completed. Incompletes, of course, can wreck havoc on a student's financial aid, eligibility for scholarships and assistantships, and just look bad on a transcript. Does anyone else face this dilemma? Does anybody have advice on how to handle it?

Thanks to all who have responded. This has been very helpful

Bill Bryans  
Department of History  
Oklahoma State University

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I also found the discussion on the role of the faculty member in the internship helpful. Because we are a unionized faculty, internship supervision is counted as part of the teaching load. At the end of the academic

year they count up all the interns the faculty member had and then pay an overage above the regular teaching load. There is some formula for compensation that I'm not sure of the details. The bottom line is that at Youngstown State internship supervision is considered teaching.

Donna DeBlasio

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At IUPUI we require 4 credit hours of internship experience. We count all of the internships each academic year as the equivalent of a class, so they are part of the teaching load. The public history director also gets a class released for running the program. Most of our full-time qualified students have ten-month, half-time (20 hours a week), paid internships with a variety of partners in the community. Most of the partners cost-share. We assign a letter grade, generally based on supervisors' assessments, intern reports, intern seminars, and faculty assessment. In practice, most students earn an A. We provide the intern a letter of appointment and the partner a letter of agreement. All public history students must serve an internship, so if they cannot accept a paid position or we cannot fund them, we help arrange a volunteer internship. Those internships count 50 hours of work as a credit hour, or 200 hours of work to earn the required four credits.

Good discussion.

Sincerely,

Phil Scarpino  
Director of Public History  
IUPUI

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MTSU MA students are required to complete a 3 credit hour internship, which is defined as a minimum of 300 hours experiential learning at an approved institution. Before a student can begin an internship, a 3-way memorandum of agreement must be executed identifying the intern's mentor/supervisor, intern's responsibilities, terms of service (e.g., end-start dates, weekly schedule, hourly wage, stipend, reimbursement for travel, fieldwork expenses, etc.), and anticipated work product/s. Students receive a letter grade based on a written evaluation from the mentor/supervisor and the quality of a required internship report (part description, part reflection, work product/s as appendix) Most, but not all, students earn an A. The faculty member assigned as internship

coordinator is the instructor of record for the internship course, so this duty is counted in his/her teaching load.

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How internships are evaluated--both on their own terms and relative to other degree or certificate requirements--does, indeed, present public historians with much food for thought. I agree with those who have found this a worthwhile discussion.

Students in the M. A. in Historical Administration at Eastern Illinois University must satisfactorily complete a six-month internship as the capstone to their year of study (two semesters of full time course work). They take comprehensive written exams over both semesters of course work at the end of the second semester and just prior to their departures for internships. Upon successful completion of the internship, for which they receive 6 hours of credit, they must provide an formal internship report that documents the project or project(s) with which they were involved. This also includes a written evaluation by their supervisor(s) regarding the performance of their assignment of duties.

A further assessment of the internship experience is made during oral exams, which cannot be scheduled until the completion of the internship. Oral exams are also comprehensive in nature. Students field questions regarding the content of their courses (this is where the faculty reviews their performance on their comprehensive written exams), the internship experience, plans for continuing professional development, and field-wide issues relating to historical agencies, archives, museums, and the field of public history at large.

A letter grade was assigned for the internship experience for several years, but have now gone to a P/F designation. The faculty believes, as did the University Curriculum Committee, that this was a less arbitrary means awarding credit. The internship requirement is 6 hrs. How does one assign an A or a B to a successfully completed internship? It can be done, of course, but is influenced by many mitigating and sometimes unique considerations.

[Terry Barnhart <tabarnhart@eiu.edu>](mailto:tabarnhart@eiu.edu)

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In response to Bill's last question, we struggled with the same messy situation for years before we hit on the idea of having students, who were by and large completing their internship in the summer anyway, and still are, enroll in the internship course the following fall semester. This had the effect of forcing all students into summer internships, which, in turn, made the whole record-keeping process much more efficient. In practice, the internship coordinator does the set-up work during the spring, maintains contact with students as necessary throughout the summer (with the occasional on-site visit if there is a dicey situation), then collects the evaluations and reports in the fall semester, reads through all the stuff, sometimes schedules a personal interview with an intern, and assigns the grades. The instructor's actual work is distributed between spring and fall, but the course is listed on the instructor's fall teaching assignment.

Rebecca Conrad

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In responding to Bill's comments on incompletes, we can give a grade of PR denoting that the student is making progress on the internship. It's the same thing we do for students taking thesis hours and haven't finished the thesis. Once the PR is changed to a grade only the grade appears on the transcript.

Donna DeBlasio  
Youngstown State University

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Bill:

You indicate that a "D" grade would be a passing grade. That would not be the case at the University at Albany, where the "D" grade does not exist for graduate students. Graduate students are required to maintain an average of "B," and even a "B-" would not be acceptable. A grade of "C" would need to be balanced by a grade of "A." As far as assigning a grade of incomplete is concerned, our students who intern during the summer register for the twelve-week session, but our internship requires a full semester, which for us is fourteen weeks. Some students start their internship before classes begin, and thus are able to finish by the end of the summer session; others complete the course after the session has ended, and so they initially receive a grade of incomplete. When they successfully complete the internship, that grade is changed to "S." That does not pose any problems on the students record, since the "I" grade

then disappears.

You raised the question of whether the lack of a regular grade for the internship on the student's transcript might be of concern to a future employer. I really don't think that would be a problem, since I don't recall any instance of a prospective employer requesting a copy of a public history graduate's transcript. Those who apply for further graduate study do have to provide them, of course.

Ivan

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Rebecca:

I'm surprised that your university permits students to do their internships in the summer while registering for them in the fall. At the University at Albany that's not permitted. Although I assume there is some pedagogical reason that would be given for that, I think the real reason is that the university would not derive as much revenue if they permitted that practice.

I'm delighted to learn that your university and some others actually count internship supervision as part of a faculty member's workload.

Ivan

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Actually our students can't enroll in the internship course in the summer. Given the budget cuts and other issues YSU counts the two internship courses (that is the undergraduate and graduate versions of the course) in our total summer course allotment. This summer we had to cut back our total summer course offerings to ten, down from 13 in 2008. This meant that in order to offer enough content courses we had to eliminate the summer thesis, internship and two of the three study abroad courses this year. For the students this means that they can do an internship in the summer but can't actually take the course until fall.

Donna

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Ivan,

Our rationale, accepted by the department, is that internship evaluation actually occurs toward the end of fall semester: many students are just completing their internship when fall semester begins, so they have to schedule report writing with other coursework. By having a semester to do this, there is time for consultation and revision, if necessary. Secondary rationale is that we avoid the possibility of an under-enrolled summer course, which was always a possibility when we allowed students to register for the internship course in any semester.

Of course, as you note, this scheme deprives the university of summer tuition dollars, but because summer enrollment in the internship course never was a requirement, this has not been an issue.

The discussion on required readings and class meetings has caught my attention. We require PhD students to attend a monthly colloquium during their residency year, and we've had some initial discussion about adopting a similar practice with MA students as part of the internship.

Rebecca Conrad