

CLASSROOMS IN THE "REAL WORLD:"
A HISTORY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

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A former student of mine came excitedly into the office the other day to announce that "it" was the "best thing since the invention of the wheel." Another student observed that had he not taken advantage of "it," he would have been turned down for his current job. Still another lamented that after four years of undergraduate education, he still was uncertain as to what he wanted to do. He was convinced that had he taken a quarter to do "it," he would at least have some direction.

What is "it"? The "it" that all of these students refer to is the internship program at Georgia College.¹ Internships are programs in experience-based education through which students can earn academic credit and gain work experience at the same time. The idea of education outside the classroom is not a new one. For the most part such experiential education has been associated with non-traditional educational institutions, such as Antioch in Ohio, or perhaps with a variation on cooperative education such as that practiced at Boston's Northeastern University.² Georgia College, too, has a long record of internship participation. Students in psychology spend a quarter at nearby Central State Hospital practicing their technical skills in working with the mentally ill; nursing students spend time in hospitals applying their training as well. As a teacher's college, the school has a long experience with student or associate teaching. The history department has had some association with this kind of education. Our students might have an occasional internship, and certainly many of our students participate in the educational sequence and through that student or associate teaching.

For those students who were not training for teaching, though, the internship was rather grudgingly allowed rather than actively encouraged. It is only in the last five years that we have come to see the internship as a viable part of an undergraduate education.³ There are several reasons for the change. First, we have frequently been asked by both students and financially hard-pressed parents of students: What do I do with a history major? While we could easily list the varied things that history majors might do, we could seldom back up our statements with real examples. We asked that students take our courses on faith, but for an increasingly job-conscious student population such rhetoric did not suffice. Internships not only provide the examples but also give training while students are still under the supervision of their undergraduate instructors. Related to this was the sobering but important realization that most of our students neither want nor should follow our footsteps into the profession of history. We needed an explicit way of directing those students toward other possibilities. Internship education furnishes a low risk way for students to engage in career exploration. Finally, we came to realize that the agency practitioners of history had much to offer our students. Whether located in museums, archives, law offices, or government agencies, they could be a valuable part of any student's education. Internships allowed us to supplement the classroom, thus not only enriching the education of our students and helping the agencies, but opening the classroom to others since interns in the field do not take up classroom space.⁴

The shift to a positive attitude is an important prelude to the development of a viable internship program. For any department or school undertaking such a program a part of the battle will be the positive and continuous support of the faculty rather than the grudging acceptance of the idea. A second step is the development of opportunities thought appropriate for the education and training of a history major. It did not take much time or much imagination to list the institutions in our area directly connected with history: the Georgia Department of Archives and History, the National Archives and Records

Service, the Georgia Historical Society, and numerous museums, ranging from Ocmulgee Indian Mounds to "living museums" such as Jarrell Plantation or Georgia Agrirama.⁵ Less obvious but equally important possibilities exist with the Social Security Administration, the local District Attorney's Office, the Area Planning and Development Commission, local or state institutions (we are particularly blessed in that regard in Milledgeville since we have a state hospital, a women's prison, a men's prison, a youth development center, and a veteran's hospital), and local radio and newspaper offices. Although it has taken several years to develop and refine these internship possibilities, the response of the offices and agencies has been most enthusiastic. To summarize the reaction of one agency employer, interns have helped him stretch limited budgets, aid in the recruitment of young talent, and reinforce agency-college connections.⁶

A third step in the development of a program is student recruitment, in many ways the most difficult aspect of the program. While students seek work experience, they are reluctant to relocate for a quarter. They are often as uncertain of participating in the real world as they are dubious of the benefits of taking more course work in the traditional classroom. It takes frequent and sometimes long sessions to help students decide on both whether and which internship experience to take. At the same time, a student's parents may need convincing. As certain as they are of the benefits of work experience, they may be reluctant to see their son or daughter living in a larger city, moving to a strange apartment, or adding to the financial burden for the one-quarter internship experience. Indeed, the same parents who instruct their children to take something practical (and hence not history) are often the same parents who resist the opportunities afforded by internships.

In order to secure the support of the parents and students all manner of advertising is important: fliers, reminders, brochures, and question-and-answer sheets can all be used. Ultimately, though, it is personal contact that brings students into the program. It is those students in your classes whom you stop in the hall and for whom you set up appointments who undertake this challenging experience. Each department should have a coordinator whose specific duty is to recruit and administer the program; that same coordinator must get the full support of the faculty and college in order to secure the success of the program.

The recruitment process must go a further step. Not all students are suitable for all kinds of internship positions. Some screening is necessary. Internships are generally appropriate for only advanced students, preferably at the junior and senior level. Archivist positions can demand a combination of dealing with the public and doing assiduous research--can the student handle both? Some students are too shy to be put into the public spotlight; a judgment on the part of the coordinator might decide whether the intern will grow out of that shyness by being forced to deal with people or whether the intern will suffer and thus should be placed in a less public position. It must be stressed, though, that it is equally valuable for a student to decide against a specific job or career on the basis of an internship as it is to decide in favor of it.

How does one undertake such screening? Just as there is no automatic indicator of graduate school success, there is no magic formula that will tell the department coordinator just which students belong where. In part, the decision is a judgment based on the students' desires, ambitions, and career plans. In part, the decision may be made on academic performance. It must be underscored, however, that the best classroom students might not necessarily be the best interns. Some students with marginal academic achievements have had outstanding internship experiences. In making the selection of interns and in matching interns to positions, one must also remember that the student will

not only be learning from the program but will also be representing your college or your department.

Finally, student recruitment must begin early in a student's academic career. Although internships are generally taken during a student's senior year and no sooner than the junior year, planning for the experience is important. Required courses or unique electives can often preempt an internship experience if proper planning is not followed. Such planning can make the difference between graduating in four years or not, and that, as a former intern reminded me not long ago, can be a factor in deciding whether or not to accept a position in the first place.⁷

Effective recruitment is but one part of effective administration of an internship program. There are many conceivable ways of administering internships, but regardless of the method chosen one must maintain the high academic standards of the classroom even though the education is outside of the traditional walls. The uncertainty as to whether this is being done is often the biggest stumbling block to retaining faculty and administrative support for the program.

At Georgia College, internship administration operates on both the college and departmental levels. The first is concerned with position development, funding, and agency contacts; the second provides the direct link between student interns and academic standards. The college Office of Placement, Internships, and Cooperative Education provides the first administrative function. The office is part of the college placement operation. The cooperative education and internship program began with the support of a grant from the United States Office of Education. During the five years that the grant operated, the college absorbed an increasing proportion of the costs; today, the internship office is funded solely by the college. Through that office the college seeks funding for student interns and provides travel support for faculty supervisors. The office handles contacts with many of the agencies (although an important part of internship development is the direct contact between agency employer and faculty supervisor). The office serves as an important connection in the development of new positions and in the recruitment of students who are uncertain as to which faculty member to turn to for help in the program. Without such administrative support as offered by this office, an internship program can easily disappear or lose its priority status.⁸

A second level of administration is in the department where the program is monitored to insure not only its smooth functioning but also its academic content. It is here, too, that much of the student recruitment and evaluation must take place. Thus, the departmental administration can have the most effect on the success or failure of an internship program.

There are several important aspects to the departmental administration. A description of the step-by-step administration of a program will illustrate one approach. After recruiting the student and selecting the agency or employer, the department coordinator arranges an interview between student and employer, which allows the employer to meet with the student (and vice versa) to discuss the expectations that he will have of the student. It is important that the employer accept the student and find him compatible with his needs; it is also important that the student feel comfortable before beginning the internship. After the interview a "learning guide" is developed in which the employer lists internship specifications. While the department may approve or disapprove the learning guide, it is important that the employer define what is expected. The agencies must not feel as if the interns are a burden; the work the interns undertake must fit with employer needs. The learning guide outlines both general goals and specific projects the student is expected to undertake. This may range from a statement about what the agency does and what

the student is expected to learn to the specific identification of a body of papers to catalog in an archive or a court case to work with in law offices. The learning guide is agreed to and signed by employer, student, college coordinator, and faculty supervisor. The learning guide becomes a contract between student and employer. Most interns begin their work with the first day of classes and end just before final examinations. Since the internship is often a part of a senior's last quarter in school, it is important to remind both student and employer to preserve some flexibility so that the student can meet graduation necessities.

After the student is on the job, departmental supervision consists of faculty visits and a series of informal and formal reports on the part of the student. Shortly after the internship begins, each student is required to submit a brief description of his activities during the first few days or weeks of the internship. Such a report can be used to alert the faculty supervisor to any potential difficulties that might arise. From the departmental perspective, we ask students to be alert to too much emphasis on clerical or "go-fer" duty and to report to the faculty supervisor any difficult adjustment experiences. Should these occur, they often involve differing interpretations of the learning guide rather than real problems with the work relationship. Depending on the intern and the internship, the faculty supervisor will follow the first informal report with a scheduled visit to the intern on location. As our rule of thumb, the visitation comes quite early in new internship positions; for those well established and frequently used positions, we arrange the visit later so that the student will be able to "show off" his project work to the faculty supervisor. The visit can be unstructured but should include conversations with the intern and the employer as well as a tour of the internship work site. The college office of internships provides travel support for such visits.

After the visit a second informal report is turned in to the faculty supervisor. This simply summarizes recent activities. This report is followed by a longer, more detailed, and more thorough student analysis of the internship, including descriptions of the program of the student and summaries of the internship projects. Through these reports students can make recommendations for the improvement of the internship program; we have received good advice to re-arrange certain experiences or drop others altogether. Such information is most helpful for the recruitment and placement of future interns.

The final written report is accompanied by an employer evaluation of the student's work. We have found employers to be most cooperative in the evaluation process. That evaluation and the final report are the focus of a final interview between the student, faculty supervisor, and a departmental internship committee. Such interviews serve the double purpose of discussing the program and forcing the intern to articulate his views of the program. The interview thus is not only evaluative but provides an opportunity for the student to practice his interview skills.

The three reports, the visitation, and the final interview form a part of the evaluation process. Some departments insist that these materials be the basis of using a standard grading procedure. Partly because of doubts on this and because we emphasize the work experience rather than the grade point average, our department evaluates on a pass-fail basis. Few students object to the practice, and they gain more from the experience if they are not working for the grade. Internships are usually arranged so that the student averages a forty-hour work week. For this, the student can receive fifteen quarter hours of academic credit. Some internships are closer to campus and can be arranged for fewer hours academic credit. The department must reserve the discretionary right to determine what proportion of that credit may be substituted for major-related courses. It is our normal practice to allow the

application of part of the credit to the major and a part of the credit to the student's electives.

Student interns should be advised from the beginning that the purpose of the program is work experience and not earning money. We have found, however, that for many students the relocation for one quarter, the extra expense of transportation, or the inconvenience of breaking a lease for three months can be a deterrent and eliminate what would otherwise be a valuable experience. Thus, we encourage students to seek funding from a variety of sources. In Georgia the governor's intern program is administered through the governor's office. Money is made available to students in grants that vary depending on student need and current allocations. The stipends average about \$500 and are often the difference between accepting an internship or maintaining a routine class schedule for the quarter. Other possibilities exist. Some agencies have money for internships in their budgets. Some private companies are willing to sponsor an internship that is named after them--the Delta Airlines internship for example. We are also exploring the possibility of having students solicit support from community agencies in their home towns. Kiwanis or Rotary Clubs might be able to appropriate \$500 to support one of their local students in this unique opportunity. It must be kept in mind that any of these funding possibilities are secondary to the purpose of the program. It is the work experience that is the most important aspect and where the emphasis must be placed.

Internships are not required of all students. Increasing numbers are expressing an interest and are taking the program. Students have found that the experience can be the difference in securing that often elusive initial job offer. Students from our program now work in such varied places as television stations, the Georgia State Archives, an historical planning agency, the Georgia Agrirama, or a parole officer. Others have found that the experience steered them away from what they once thought were promising career opportunities. Once the administrative routines, agency contacts, and student recruitment procedures are regularized, the program can be a smoothly operating part of the academic history major. An internship program cannot entirely erase the persistent questions asked of us by our would be majors but the internship program can go far in bridging the putative gap between classroom history and real world practicality of the history major. The program requires administrative time and off-campus travel but the contributions made to student learning more than off-set these added teaching factors.

NOTES

¹Portions of this material appeared in "Innovations in Instruction," Newsletter of the Georgia Association of Historians, VII (Fall, 1980), 7-8. The author would like to thank his fellow panelists at the annual meeting of the Georgia Association of Historians, Jekyll Island, Georgia, March 27, 1981. For specific information in that panel and for help in developing our program, thanks go to Michael Gill, Director of Internships, Cooperative Education, and Placement, Georgia College; Gayle Peters, Regional Archivist, National Archives and Records Service, East Point, Georgia; and Lorraine Lee, Training Officer, Georgia Department of Archives and History.

²Miles L. Bradbury, "Internships in History: An Argument and Example," The Newberry Papers in Family and Community History, no. 78-3 (January, 1978), 1-7.

³The attitude is gaining encouragement from a number of sources. The American Historical Association's National Coordinating Committee on History is encouraging internships. See, too, the report of the Commission on the Humanities, The Humanities in American Life (Berkeley, 1980), 66, 88. The

concern for training in public history for graduate students also underscores the need for internships. See Joan Hoff Wilson, "Is the Historical Profession an Endangered Species?" The Public Historian, II (1980), 4-21.

⁴Michael A. Gill, "A College Perspective on Internships," remarks presented to the Georgia Association of Historians, March 27, 1981.

⁵Jarrell Plantation near Juliette, Georgia, is a restored 19th century plantation on which work is done using period equipment and interpretive tours provided for visitors. Interns have participated in the research behind the exhibits as well as the interpretive tours. Georgia Agrirama, Tifton, Georgia, is an ambitious effort to recapture Georgia's agricultural past.

⁶Gayle Peters, "Internships and the Employer," remarks presented to the Georgia Association of Historians, March 27, 1981.

⁷Lorraine Lee, "Internships and the Student," remarks presented to the Georgia Association of Historians, March 27, 1981.

⁸Ibid.