

College & Research Libraries News, Vol 81, No 9 (2020)

Quanetta Batts, Kian Flynn, Elliott Stevens, and Anuradha Vedantham

Starting early

High school students in paid internships at academic libraries

Quanetta Batts is program director for outreach and engagement at The Ohio State University Libraries, email: batts.8@osu.edu (<mailto:batts.8%40osu.edu?subject=>), Kian Flynn is geography and global studies librarian at the University of Washington, email: flynnk7@uw.edu (<mailto:flynnk7%40uw.edu?subject=>), Elliott Stevens is English studies and research commons librarian at the University of Washington, email: res22@uw.edu (<mailto:res22%40uw.edu?subject=>), Anuradha Vedantham is assistant university librarian for research services at Princeton University, email: anuv@princeton.edu (<mailto:anuv%40princeton.edu?subject=>)

© 2020 Quanetta Batts, Kian Flynn, and Elliott Stevens, and Anuradha Vedantham

Many universities feature programs that offer internships to high school students, but how many academic libraries offer such programs? Better yet, how many academic libraries currently run paid internships for high school students? The answer, not many. We believe our institutions (The Ohio State University, the University of Washington, and Princeton University) are among the only ones currently offering such internships. In this article, we will provide some background about how we started our internships, delve into themes that our programs share, and discuss what the future holds for our internships. If you're interested in pursuing a high school internship at your institution, we encourage you to reach out to us.

The internships

The Ohio State University

In 2016, The Ohio State University Libraries partnered with the Expanding Visions Foundation (EVF)¹ to host their young adult Career Institute at the Thompson Library. The nine-week institute included modules covering self-assessment, interview preparation, and post interview skills focused on preparing students to be successful in the workplace.

In the initial agreement with EVF, University Libraries was to provide a space for the Career Institute and think about how to enhance the weekly learning sessions in the future. Professor Nena Couch and Associate Professor Deidra Herring attended the sessions and observed the various workshops. They reported high praises for the curriculum but didn't see how University Libraries' involvement would enhance the great work the EVF team was already doing. University Libraries was still very interested in partnering with EVF, however, and colleagues suggested that University Libraries assist with the high school program instead. After some conversation with Executive Administration in the University Libraries, the decision was made to offer internships for some of the EVF high school program graduates.

Quanetta Batts, program director for outreach and engagement, was asked to lead the planning for the internship program along with Couch and Herring. This team of three developed a program plan and served as liaisons for the EVF summer internship pilot during summer 2017, which included five high school interns. Based on the success of the pilot, University Libraries has continued the program with Batts and Couch as the primary program coordinators and liaisons. Nine students participated in summer 2018, and eight participated in summer 2019.

The internship program at University Libraries would not be possible without EVF partners. Because the interns are all graduates of EVF's Career Institute, they come to University Libraries well trained and committed to learning and growing during their time in the program. During the institute, students learn how to apply for a job, prepare for interviews, create a professional resume, build credit responsibility, and practice business etiquette.

Interns are assigned a job in the libraries, where they get hands-on experience with administrative, clerical, and various library-related tasks. They also meet every Wednesday for 60-to-90 minutes to discuss topics, such as college preparation, personal branding, and careers in libraries. Over the three summers, interns have toured branch library

locations (including the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum and University Archives), visited the Ohio Stadium and the OSU Planetarium, and participated in panel discussions led by current Ohio State student employees. In addition to their part-time work in a library and the weekly cohort meetings, the interns are paired with a mentor (librarian or staff member) who they meet for lunch, shadow at various meetings, and interact with on an informal level.

University Libraries is committed to improving the EVF internship program. At the end of each summer, everyone involved completes a thorough evaluation. All feedback is taken into consideration, and program improvements are implemented based on that feedback. The survey responses also communicate the impact the program has had on staff, faculty, and the interns. One supervisor stated, "Their enthusiasm and attitude were a great addition to the library. A mentor raved, "Having the opportunity to share lunch with my mentee and meet with him to discuss his experience in the libraries was great. The unstructured time to walk, talk, and visit other spaces on campus allows for a more relaxed/casual time for learning about their experiences." Echoing the intern comments, one mentor suggested that the mentor role be greater than going to lunch. One intern summed the program up perfectly, saying he was able to gain "life lessons and professional lessons at the same time."

The University of Washington

In early 2017, Kian Flynn and Elliott Stevens, two new librarians at the University of Washington Libraries (UWL), set about exploring the creation of an internship for high school students. Because they couldn't find any examples of programs in library literature, they reached out to the Career Office, where they got advice about running internships. They also contacted the UW Dream Project, a campus program focused on dismantling systemic and institutional racism, and were put into contact with a local public librarian, Nancy Garrett, who had developed dozens of relationships with high school students from groups underrepresented in higher education and librarianship.

Flynn, Stevens, and Garrett worked together to devise an internship in which three high school students would spend 30 hours in the UWL, create two digital stories and one interactive map, and earn \$500. They decided that the goals of the internship would be to connect young people from underrepresented groups with academic resources, to work with interns on media projects relevant in higher education, and to help high school students prepare for college and feel comfortable in academic spaces. They put together a proposal that was quickly approved by the UWL Administration. The inaugural internship in 2017 was a success, and, in 2018, the internship expanded to six students. In 2019, there were ten students.

The UW Libraries' High School Internship (HSI) could not exist without the generous support of public librarians at Seattle Public Library (SPL) neighborhood branches. These librarians, notably Teen Services librarians Nancy Garrett and Siri Alderson, have been instrumental in promoting the program to students who engage with SPL through their attendance at SPL's Homework Help programming. SPL has also provided space in their branches for UWL to deliver informational presentations about the internship, conduct interviews, and host a showcase celebration.

Throughout the program, the student interns gain exposure to the services offered by an academic library and insight into the nature of librarians' work. By working on projects related to digital storytelling and narrative map-making, students get firsthand experience working with platforms that are being used by today's academics and supported by libraries. The students also have the opportunity to ask questions of a visiting panel of academic and public librarians, library student employees, and graduate students and professors from UW's Information School.

Going forward, HSI would like to connect with more public libraries, public high schools, and local organizations. The program is also looking to continue to bring back former interns and maintain long-term relationships with them. This past summer, two former interns returned to the program and served as mentors to the current crew of interns, speaking about their recent college experiences.

Princeton University

In 2019, a conversation between Anne Jarvis, Robert H. Taylor 1930 university librarian for Princeton University Library (PUL), and Kristin Appelget, director of the Princeton Office of Community and Regional Affairs, led to a pilot internship program for three high school students. The paid internships, primarily organized by two library administrators (Anu Vedantham, assistant university librarian for research services, and Daina Wilpon, director of talent and organizational effectiveness), involved 12 library staff members as mentors and supervisors. Nonprofit organizations in Princeton, New Jersey, and Trenton, New Jersey, recruited and identified the students.

The internship was designed to help high school students explore and become inspired by careers in academic librarianship. The program emphasized two-way aspects of learning, with staff gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences and concerns of the student interns. Staff collaborated across locations and organizational units on a daily basis as they together managed the students' time and schedules.

As a result, the collaboration between PUL, the University Office of Community and Regional Affairs, and local community organizations has significantly grown. At Princeton, the vision that a paid summer internship could develop

career interests in librarianship for high school students from typically underrepresented groups gained interest at several levels. The pilot was successful, and PUL intends to continue this program in 2020.

The University Office of Community and Regional Affairs identified two nonprofit organizations for PUL to partner with: in Trenton, the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program, run by the Millhill Child and Family Development (MCFD) Center, and in Princeton, the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), run by the Municipality of Princeton's Human Services Office. Both programs have conducted high school internships for several years but had not placed students in academic libraries before. The MCFD Center handles summer placement for about 100 students each year while the SYEP places about 50 students annually.

PUL staff completed administrative training from both organizations and conducted outreach to and interviews with prospective interns. The matching process, schedule, and duration differed across the two community partners, which added complexity to scheduling. Transportation for the students from Trenton posed a challenge, as did university paperwork for students under the age of 18.

Representatives from both community partners visited PUL several times meeting with supervisors, conducting site assessments, and checking on students' progress. The formal structure of the programs helped library staff better understand and address challenges in supervising high school age students.

The summer interns directly tackled tasks and projects core to academic librarianship. Each student worked in two library locations each day—one library in the morning and a different one in the afternoon—and they had a supervisor and a mentor at each location. The supervisors met with their students daily to give them specific tasks and check on their progress. The mentors met with their students weekly to discuss careers in librarianship as well as preparation for college. In addition, the students participated in group tours and presentations, exploring PUL's Special Collections and offsite storage facility, the Research Collections and Preservation Consortium, and met with subject specialists.

Each student was responsible for "daily work" tasks, such as staffing desks, shelf reading, map scanning, and handling microfiche, in addition to an independent research project that was on a topic of their own choice. Students reported that this combination worked very well for them. They chose complex research topics--such as gender in sports, art history related to American wars, and African American history--and they shared that they developed strong relationships with subject librarians based on the research projects.

Assessment for the internship program included conversations with the interns, supervisors, and mentors, as well as formal instruments required by the nonprofit community partners. The students reported that they learned a great deal and gained insights into library careers. The supervisors and mentors developed good relationships with the students. Suggestions for program improvement included further recognition of the time commitment involved, a better process to break down large-scale projects into smaller tasks that high school students could work on independently, and additional training to help support the students both in and outside of work.

Overall, the pilot demonstrated strong potential for future programming and PUL intends to continue with the program. The selection process of mentors and supervisors will be adjusted so that projects can be identified in spring, and the matching process of students to locations and tasks can also be a more thoughtful process moving forward. Cohorts of students will be encouraged to connect with each other so that the impact of the program can persist across years.

Conclusion

We have enjoyed sharing the design and growth of our very different internships with each other, and the process of coming together to write this article and combine our voices and experiences have been valuable. For the past three years, the student interns at OSU and UW have participated in a joint web conference call, where they've shared and reflected on their respective internship experiences in academic libraries. We would love to have more high school internships to connect and collaborate with in future years. We hope that the contents here have sparked your curiosity and made you wonder if an internship for high school students would work at your institution.

If you have any questions about what we have done, please contact us, and let's work on these programs together, finding strength and stability in collaboration. Or if you run a program that we have missed, we apologize for not crediting your efforts and would also like to forge a connection and learn from you.

Note

1. See www.expandingvisions.net (<http://www.expandingvisions.net>).