

OHMA INTERNSHIP GUIDE¹

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OHMA INTERNSHIP GUIDE:

This guide describes the curriculum requirements for internship opportunities undertaken by OHMA students, discusses the process for setting up and evaluating a placement, and outlines your obligations as a student and the responsibilities of onsite internship supervisors. Each internship is unique, reflecting the specific goals and structure agreed on by an individual student and the participating organization. The intention of this document is to provide guidance to you and to partner organizations to make the most of the internship experience, rather than to limit the nature of these experiences. Students and partner organizations are encouraged to structure programs that meet their specific professional, academic and institutional needs, so long as they fulfill the core requirements of the internship program.

For more information, contact OHMA's internship coordinator, Amy Starcheski, Director of OHMA, at 212-851-4395 or aas39@columbia.edu.

OVERVIEW:

An internship entails a significant professional training experience, chosen to complement your academic coursework, prior work experiences, and career interests. An internship should accomplish the following for students:

- Expose you to the nature of work in a given area of oral history, allowing you to apply theory and practice in a real world setting.
- Fill gaps in your understanding of oral history work, providing practical experience that extends your knowledge of areas covered in coursework.
- Allow you to gain fresh insights into your own interests and aptitudes and help build a resume and portfolio of professional projects and experiences.
- Provide unique opportunities to establish professional networks, working alongside and under the supervision of experienced professionals.

In addition, internship projects should result in a product or products that are useful to a sponsoring organization and beneficial to you as a student in OHMA.

Although the internship is primarily intended as an educational experience for oral history students, it also constitutes a partnership between you (a student), OHMA, and a partner organization. For this reason, each internship will differ in its assignments and expectations. The general parameters of these projects should be determined in advance, with your learning objectives and the institution's goals clearly stated and agreed upon by you, the sponsoring organization, and a faculty advisor in a written agreement before the internship begins.

Beyond its usefulness in creating products for an organization and for advancing your professional goals, your internship should engage you intellectually. It provides an important opportunity to make connections between theoretical and practical issues covered in classes.

GETTING STARTED:

Considering the choices: Before looking for a suitable internship location, you should conduct a self-assessment of your skills, interests, values, and career goals, considering the desired outcomes of the experience. As part of this assessment, you should:

- Prepare an up-to-date resume and cover letter that reviews your credentials and goals. You may need to revise your resume and letter when you apply for specific opportunities, but as part of the process of self-assessment you will find it helpful to describe your skills and summarize your previous experiences.
- Consider any requirements and limitations for your internship experience: are there geographical, financial, personal, scholastic or professional factors that will help determine a proper placement?

Looking for a placement: OHMA's internship coordinator will provide interested students with a list of potential internship placements. You are responsible for contacting potential sponsors, negotiating the general parameters of your project, and seeking input from faculty advisors. To find the most advantageous situation, this process of identifying potential organizations should begin well in advance of the internship's anticipated start, at least several months before the end of the preceding semester. Students should begin researching possible summer placements in January and February; many applications are due as early as March.

A few oral history-related organizations coordinate structured and, sometimes competitive, internship programs. Such programs may offer monetary compensation in the form of a stipend or salary, or may cover expenses such as housing or travel. In these cases, the sponsoring organization often will determine the general or specific internship project(s) in advance. Organizations that sponsor paid internships typically have a formal application process with preset deadlines. Students who are seeking paid internship opportunities or prefer a formally structured program should investigate such programs and understand the specific projects for which interns are sought in order to ensure an enriching experience.

For students desiring a more flexible situation, it often is possible to design a useful project in collaboration with the sponsoring organization. Students who prefer this alternative should begin by talking to OHMA about their interests and determine how best to make contact with the desired location. Because the process for pursuing these opportunities is less predictable than with more structured programs, you should be certain to begin your investigations early.

From the standpoint of fulfilling OHMA program requirements, students may choose either a paid or unpaid internship. Internships during the academic year typically are fulfilled at organizations within the New York City area. During the summer, it is more common to elect an internship that requires residence outside New York. Students should consider opportunities to work at organizations outside the U.S.

Sources of information for internship opportunities include:

- Classmates and OHMA alumni, OHMA staff, faculty advisors, and other oral history professionals at Columbia and elsewhere
- Twitter – many jobs and internships are now listed this way. Make an account and follow the organizations, people, and projects you want to connect with.
- Websites maintained by professional organizations and employment resources including:
 - H-oralhist: The main oral history listserv
 - The National Council on Public History: <http://ncph.org/cms/careers-training/>
 - The Society of American Archivists: <http://careers.archivists.org/jobs>
 - Smithsonian Office of Research Training and Services: <http://www.smithsonianofi.com/internship-opportunities/>
 - American Association of Museums: <http://www.aam-us.org/>
 - The American Association for State and Local History: <http://www.aaslh.org/>
 - Federal Government: <http://www.usajobs.gov>
- Columbia’s Center for Career Education also maintains a webpage dedicated to the topic of internships, which includes internship listings and information about resources available to Columbia students through the CCE. See: <http://www.careereducation.columbia.edu/findajob/internship>

Defining your project: Once you have identified an institution where you might like to carry out your internship (or have been accepted into a structured internship program), you should make contact with an appropriate staff member and begin discussions about opportunities to work at that organization. This period of negotiation should lead to a clear understanding about the specific project(s) for which you will be responsible. Typically, this will entail one well-defined project that you can complete during the term of the internship. However, a variety of project designs and assignments are possible, depending on the goals set by the institution, the internship on-site supervisor, and yourself. [You may find it useful to share details from **INFORMATION FOR SPONSORING INSTITUTIONS/ORGANIZATIONS** (see below).]

Before the internship begins, the main project goals and expectations should be laid out in an **internship agreement**. This document articulates mutually acceptable expectations and describes your responsibilities as an intern, your supervisor’s responsibilities as a boss and mentor, and should specify a beginning and ending date, a weekly work schedule, and any compensation. The agreement might take the form of a letter or a written and signed contract. You should submit a copy of this agreement to OHMA’s Internship coordinator. [See the “Internship Agreement Form” at the back of this guide.]

Doing your internship: A successful internship should provide you an opportunity to gain new insights into oral history work, working under the mentorship of an experienced and knowledgeable professional. You should look upon your internship as a learning and professional work experience and comply with rules and guidelines established by your supervisor including appropriate dress, work hours, and prioritization of tasks. You should assume a proactive, rather than a passive, approach to your internship experience, and work to

establish a clear dialogue with your supervisor and mutually supportive relationships with other interns and members of the staff. Try to seek out a broad range of experiences during your internship, expanding your involvement into as many areas of the organization as possible. Through these efforts, you will find that internships can play an important part in developing your skills and building a network of professional contacts. Plan to keep in touch with people from your internship organization after you leave.

As with any work experience, students may find that their experiences differ from expectations, and most students discover that their actual experiences vary. Despite careful planning, issues such as funding, organizational and personnel changes, and the type of guidance you are given can alter your assigned projects and dramatically affect your ability to perform expected tasks. For example, your supervisor may ask you to work on projects in addition to or instead of those initially identified. In these situations, internship supervisors will value your flexibility and willingness to handle changing circumstances or to follow new directions. Open communication with the organization's staff is important to ensure that you understand the factors shaping institutional priorities and to enable you to perform to the best of your capabilities. The OHMA staff also can be consulted for advice in handling unexpected situations during your internship.

Evaluating your project: At the completion of the internship, you will submit a final report describing your activities and outcomes of the major projects you undertook. The report will be submitted to the internship course instructor; a copy of this report, amended if appropriate, should be shared with the supervisor at the sponsoring organization and submitted for posting on OHMA's website.

The final report should cover the following topics:

- Explain the project you undertook, or the issue/problem that your project sought to address. What was the sponsoring organization's purpose in supporting this project?
- Describe your project: what was the methodology and how it was developed to reflect the organization's goals and larger mission? How did it draw from similar projects at other organizations?
- What challenges did you face?
- What were the project outcomes? How were they successful? How not? Why?
- Outline proposed or actual next steps for this project. What will or should happen next? How do those plans reflect the learning outcomes of your work?

The report should also include images depicting your project, examples of materials created during the project, and other illustrative material. The report you write will not only be of value to you as you think through the work you did, and as you explain to potential employers your work experience, but will also be useful to other students as they consider similar projects.

In addition, throughout your internship OHMA will maintain communication with your on-site supervisor, asking for periodic reports about your activities. Supervisors will be asked to provide a final written evaluation of the your projects and activities. Supervisors are encouraged, too, to share their assessments with you.

Academic credit: OHMA's internship program is optional, and the internship course counts as an elective. Students doing an internship for credit should register for Oral History Internship, in either the fall (G4075) or spring (G4076) semesters. Depending on the intensity of your internship, you may register for 2 (100 hours), 3 (150 hours), or 4 (200 hours) credits. In some cases, enrollment in this course will not directly coincide with the actual term during which you serve your placement (e.g., you may register for an internship during your spring semester, but might not complete the work for the section until the end of the summer). Students should register for summer internships in the spring semester prior to or the fall semester following the internship. You will receive credit for the class after you have successfully completed all of your obligations and have submitted your case study report to OHMA's internship coordinator. Your transcript will show an incomplete until this work is submitted.

The internship course is pass/fail. A pass depends upon the quality of work performed at the sponsoring institution and upon other aspects of the internship such as written reports, and (for school-year internships) participation in the internship seminar.

Reflections: Engagement in thoughtful reflective practice is a critical component of a successful internship experience. An internship experience begins and ends with a process of self-assessment. Through reflection, you connect your internship work to theoretical and practical learning in the classroom. In addition, reflection encourages you to undergo thoughtful and critical analysis of your work experience and the institutional settings where this work occurs. This should entail honest assessments about your own competencies, weaknesses, and interests, as well as efforts to understand your project as it relates to the obligations, challenges, and opportunities of oral history institutions. This reflection is built into the internship experience in three ways:

1. During the spring and fall semesters, students undertaking an internship will participate in a monthly group meeting to discuss internship experiences and other relevant theoretical, practical, and professional issues. By participating in these discussions and learning from each others' experiences, students can expand their understanding of the challenges and opportunities that oral history professionals face.
2. At the end of all internship experiences, you will turn in a report shared with the sponsoring organization. (See the section on Evaluating Your Project above for more information.).

It is important to recognize that internship experiences may not always be positive or achieve intended outcomes. A 'failed' project or a disappointing experience will still fulfill OHMA requirements; perhaps more importantly, even disappointing experiences should result in a valuable learning experience. In such a case, thorough reflection upon the factors that led to unmet expectations – structural, organizational, professional, financial, personal, etc. – can be extremely important as part of understanding the broader field of oral history and in establishing personal and professional goals.

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR INTERNSHIP:

For OHMA students, the internship experience should provide an opportunity to undertake substantial independent projects that integrate theory and skills in an applied way. To make the most of these opportunities, you should give yourself ample time for thoughtful reflection about your interests and goals at every step of the process, making sure to locate a placement that will provide the learning challenges that you need.

In practical terms, your internship might provide opportunities to help you pursue your professional aspirations. You may want an opportunity to gain experience working in a particular sector or utilizing specific kinds of skills, assessing your interest in and aptitude for a particular kind of oral history work. Or you might want to get a foot in the door at a particular institution—somewhere that is producing innovative work, with a network of professional contacts you'd like to be plugged into, or a notable organization that is close to home. To make the most of such possibilities, you should hone your professional skills and act to demonstrate your value to your sponsoring organization.

In concrete terms, your internship should produce materials that you can show to prospective employers as examples of your work. These may include letters of recommendation from the organization's staff and others with whom you worked, press coverage of events or programs that you coordinated, exhibit labels or photographs of exhibits that you helped create, or other work that you produced. Take the time to document your work and accumulate examples of products that you can use to create a portfolio.

INFORMATION FOR SPONSORING INSTITUTIONS/ORGANIZATIONS:

Structure of the program: The mission of OHMA is to teach students to conduct, analyze and share oral history interviews in both academic and public settings. In keeping with this mission, successful internship projects will allow students to participate in any part of the oral history process, from conceiving and launching a new project through researching, interviewing, and creating archives or public programming.

Successful internships allow students to apply their theoretical studies in a practical setting, while learning important professional skills. Many institutions are in need of interns to complete basic and essential projects, however we discourage students from accepting internships that will not allow for substantive involvement in the work of oral history. Inappropriate projects might include:

- Collections transcribing, cataloging, or conservation that does not build student skills
- Administrative, clerical, or retail sales work that does not include a significant contribution to the oral history process

At least one experienced professional should closely supervise and mentor the internship student, providing regular instruction, constructive feedback (including a final, written evaluation), and consistent attention throughout the internship. The onsite supervisor is also responsible for ensuring that the internship provides a substantial and challenging experience worthy of graduate-level instruction in a given field. A written work plan agreement, developed by and mutually agreeable to supervisors and students, should be finalized prior to the start of the internship. Institutional supervisors are encouraged to consult with OHMA staff for information and assistance at any point during the process of set up or completion of an internship.

Columbia Oral History MA Program

Oral History Internship Agreement

[This form should be completed by OHMA students, in consultation with the supervisor at the sponsoring organization, and should be submitted to Amy Starecheski at least one week before the start of the internship.]

Student Information:

Name:	
Email:	
Phone:	

Site Information:

Organization:	
Supervisor (name and title):	
Supervisor contact: Phone:	
Email:	
Organization address:	
Website:	

Internship Information:

Start/end date:	
Schedule:	
Student projects and responsibilities:	
Outcomes/products expected:	
Student Learning Objectives:	

This form must be approved by OHMA before the student begins the internship. We realize that it may be necessary to make minor changes to the contract within the spirit of the document.

Any questions about this form or the internship should be directed to Amy Starecheski, Director of OHMA, at 212-851-4395 or aas39@columbia.edu.

Signatures:

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Supervisor Signature _____ Date _____