Internships – Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Where can I do an internship?
A: Internships can be done at any accredited museum in the world as long as the project meets the criteria, a museum mentor at the institution agrees to supervise you, and a Museum Studies faculty approves the proposal.

Q: How many hours does an internship take?
A: Internships may be taken for variable credit, but the basic formula is 50 hours of work for one hour of credit. For example, you can work on a large project that takes 150 hours to earn three credits or do a small project that takes 50 hours to earn one credit.

Q: How do I locate a museum for my internship?
A: That depends if you already know what you want to do. Each internship experience is individualized to meet the student’s learning objectives given the available museum opportunities. The first step is to meet with your advisor. If you have an idea already, talk it over and most likely the advisor will say go for it! If you have no clue, discuss with your advisor your interests and experience and perhaps even the kind of job you might want to do someday. Your advisor can give you ideas on museums that may meet your goals. Either way, your advisor can give you contact information for internship coordinators at area museums. If you want to do your internship in another area, most major museums’ web sites have on-line information about their internship programs.

Q: How do I apply to a museum for an internship?
A: Each museum has its own process. Some are quite formal and require applications and letters of reference. Others involve contacting staff directly and letting them know of your interest. Your advisor can help you with the process for the museums you are interested in.

Q: How do I get an internship approved for credit?
A: Once you have applied to the museum for an internship and have a sense of the project you will be working on, you need to write a proposal to submit to your faculty advisor for approval. The guidelines for the proposals are posted on this web site. The advisor and your museum mentor should have a chance to comment on the proposal and to sign the final version, once you address any comments they have. Once the proposal is approved, your faculty advisor will ask the department secretary to authorize your registration for the course. Don’t forget to send a copy of the signed proposal to the mentor and your advisor, keep a copy for yourself,
and submit the original to the Museum Studies office (CA410) to be added to your file. If there are any questions about the expectations for the internship, you can all refer to the proposal for clarification.

Q: Are there paid internships?
A: Some museums offer paid internships, particularly for full-time summer internships. Check on-line internship listings for museums nationally offering paid internships. Most summer internships are advertised in the late fall with deadlines in the early spring and many are competitive. The Solution Center at IUPUI also supports paid internships for students working with certain community partners, and some area museums have work-study positions arranged through IUPUI. In addition, the IUPUI Museum Studies Program is able to support a small number of graduate students through paid internships. See your faculty advisor for further information.

Q: How is my internship evaluated?
A: The proposal guidelines specify a section on evaluation criteria. The internship should be evaluated based on that criteria by both the museum mentor (reported in writing to the faculty advisor) and the faculty advisor. The faculty advisor submits a grade for the internship based on the work documented in the final report, the mentor’s evaluation letter, and, where appropriate, a site visit or other first hand observation of the work.

Q: What goes in a final report?
A: See the guidelines for more details, but the basic purpose of the final report is both to document and reflect on the internship experience. For documentation you should have a log or other record of your time and tasks as well as visuals, if possible. You may also want to include examples of your work (a curriculum plan, catalogue sheets, exhibit concept documents). The reflection is generally an essay in which you give a narrative of the experience and, with critical self-reflection, connect it to your understanding of the museum field. This is the place to bring up issues you encountered, lessons learned, unexpected aspects (happy or otherwise), and any other insights you gained during the internship experience.

Q: Can I do an internship at a museum where I already work?
A: Yes, provided the internship is focused on work beyond your usual job responsibilities. Some students in this situation have worked in another department than their regular position or have taken on extra duties that inform and enhance their regular responsibilities.
Q: Can I get paid for an internship and still get credit?
A: Yes, but paid internships run through the IUPUI Museum Studies Program and funded as part of the graduate student’s financial support are structured as 20 hours per week internships at 3 credits a semester, and most run for ten months. These paid internships may be “prorated” for less time, but the stipend is then also reduced. See your faculty advisor for further details.

Q: What if the semester ends before my internship project is completed?
A: It is not uncommon for museum internship projects to run beyond the academic definition of a semester. If you know that your project will not be finished by the end of the semester, build that expectation into your internship proposal from the beginning. For instance if you project is to develop and implement the curriculum for a summer camp and the camp won’t take place until three weeks after the end of the spring semester in which you are enrolled, schedule your internship final report submission date accordingly and remind the faculty advisor to submit an “Incomplete” for your grade at the end of the semester. Once your project is done, complete the final report as soon as possible, request your mentor’s letter of evaluation, and the faculty member can file a “removal of incomplete” form to record your final grade. If your project runs long unexpectedly, contact your advisor as soon as possible and negotiate a possible extension.

Q: What if my project takes a dramatic turn, once I get started?
A: Hopefully carefully and thoughtfully developed proposals will work through any issues before the beginning of a project, but sometimes things outside your control will change the internship. A staff member might leave the museum or a scheduled program or exhibit might get cancelled. In that case, meet as soon as possible with the faculty advisor and, if possible, the museum mentor, to figure out an alternative project. You will likely need to revise the original proposal, but in most cases the internship can continue on schedule. Often the “glitch” becomes the most interesting learning experience of the internship!