Training Future Librarians: Creating Online, Flexible, and Effective Internships and Practicum Experiences for LIS Graduate Students

By: <u>Jenny Dale</u>, <u>Samantha Harlow</u>, and <u>Amy Harris Houk</u>

Abstract:

What roles should academic libraries play in developing future professionals? As more graduate programs, including library and information science (LIS) programs, are moving online to accommodate nontraditional students and busy schedules, this question becomes even more complex. As of January 2020, forty-two of the sixty-two ALA-accredited LIS programs offer a 100 percent online option;[1] the LIS program at UNC Greensboro (UNCG) is one of these forty-two programs. In response to these changes, the Research, Outreach, and Instruction (ROI) department at UNCG University Libraries has expanded our in-person intern and practicum programs to include new online options. Reviewing literature on designing collaborative and effective intern and practicum programs is useful for librarians when developing a relationship with any LIS department at a university.[2]

Keywords: academic libraries | LIS program | internships | practicum | graduate students | librarians

Article:

***Note: Full text of article below

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Creating Online, Flexible, and Effective Internships and Practicum Experiences for LIS Graduate Students

Jenny Dale, Samantha Harlow, and Amy Harris Houk

What roles should academic libraries play in developing future professionals? As more graduate programs, including library and information science (LIS) programs, are moving online to accommodate nontraditional students and busy schedules, this question becomes even more complex. As of January 2020, forty-two of the sixty-two ALA-accredited LIS programs offer a 100 percent online option;[1] the LIS program at UNC Greensboro (UNCG) is one of these forty-two programs. In response to these changes, the Research, Outreach, and Instruction (ROI) department at UNCG University Libraries has expanded our in-person intern and practicum programs to include new online options. Reviewing literature on designing collaborative and effective intern and practicum programs is useful for librarians when developing a relationship with any LIS department at a university.[2]

The ROI department has a long history of working with UNCG LIS interns. The face-to-face intern program has evolved over time to take a holistic approach to training future library professionals, focusing not only on the skills and knowledge necessary to staff our reference desk but also on the development of broader communication, problem-solving, and teaching skills crucial for our field. More online components have been added to this internship program, including an asynchronous Canvas learning community to house presentations and training materials, as well as streaming and recording face-to-face training through Webex or Zoom when possible for online practicum students and interns with whose schedules conflict with training.

With employers expecting practical experience from recent library school graduates, academic libraries have the opportunity to play a critical role in preparing the next generation of library professionals, even when their graduate programs are fully online. LIS practicums are crucial for future librarians to begin their careers prepared. At UNC Greensboro, the majority of the students enrolled in the program are distance students, so they may not have ready access to a traditional practicum site. To support these stu-

dents, the UNCG LIS department developed an Alternative Spring Break program where students can spend a week completing an intensive practicum experience. The head of ROI worked with a student interested in working in academic libraries in spring 2019. This practicum enabled the student to meet with librarians from various departments and create an online library tutorial. The student and the head of ROI also presented on the experience at a state conference.

In spring 2020, the UNCG online learning librarian, housed in ROI, created a completely online practicum experience for one LIS distance student. The online learning librarian met with the UNCG information literacy coordinator to discuss how in-person practicums and internships with LIS students geared toward information literacy and academic librarianship are organized in order to explore how they could adapt the practicum to an entirely online format. Based on this feedback and the reading of literature on best practices of working with LIS students, internships, and practicums, a practicum structure was developed that was flexible enough for the online student's schedule, but also met the requirements for course credit for a practicum.

In order to create a successful and individualized practicum focused on online learning and academic libraries with one UNCG LIS student in spring 2020, various synchronous virtual meetings between the student and the online learning librarian were scheduled at the beginning of the semester. Each of these meetings had an agenda on a Google Doc, where the student was a coeditor to access permalinks to readings on academic libraries, as well as various online learning resource hyperlinks. The student also tracked hours on a Google Doc and wrote reflection blog posts in WordPress on the readings and work assigned. This student was working in a public library at the time of the practicum, and they wanted to gain experience creating online learning objects on curriculum design, inclusive online pedagogy, open educational resources (OER), podcasts and makerspaces, and scholarly communication. Based on these initial meetings at the beginning of the semester, one-on-one virtual meetings with a variety of academic librarians across the state were also scheduled with this student: the student success librarian at UNCG, a community college online learning librarian, the English liaison at UNCG, a UNCG LIS professor who specializes in inclusion in makerspaces, and a librarian working at an academic UNCG makerspace. After the student read various academic literature on these specific library topics, the final products of this practicum were agreed upon in partnership: a webinar to UNCG students about getting started with podcasting at home co-led by a librarian in the Digital Media Commons at UNCG, an openly designed syllabus on Victorian literature that was added to the OER Commons repository, and an infographic for students on getting started with OER.

Our experiences adapting traditional face-to-face practicum programs to short-term and online formats have been successful. Being aware of best practices is important, but flexibility and customizability are critical for creating effective programs for students learning online and at a distance.

Notes

1. American Library Association, "Searchable Database of ALA-Accredited Programs," Education and Careers, 2020, http://www.ala.org/educationcareers/accreditedprograms/directory/search.
2. Kayo Denda and Jennifer Hunter, "Building 21st Century Skills and Creating Communities: A Team-Based Engagement Framework for Student Employment in Academic Libraries," *Journal of Library Administration* 56, no. 3 (2016): 251–65, https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2015.1121662; Jennifer A. Dixon, "Experience Required," *Library Journal* 143, no. 13 (May 10, 2018): 32–34, https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/experience-required; Tanner D. Lewey and Hannah Moody-Goo, "Management: Designing a Meaningful Reference and Instruction Internship: The MLIS Student Perspective," *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2018): 238–41, https://doi.org/10.5860/rusq.57.4.6699; Jennifer E. Nutefall, "Structuring a Successful Instruction Internship," *College and Undergraduate Libraries* 19, no. 1 (2012): 80–94, https://doi.org/10.1080/10691316.2012.652550; Geraldine Purpur and Jon Levi Morris, "The Learning Outcomes of Mentoring Library Science Students in Virtual World Reference: A Case Study," *Journal of Library and Information Services in Distance Learning* 9, no. 3 (2015): 192–203, https://doi.org/10.1080/1533290X.2015.1044690; Max Eckard, Ashley Rosener, and Lindy Scripps-Hoekstra, "Factors That Increase the Probability of a Successful Academic Library Job Search," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 40, no. 2 (March 2014): 107–15, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2014.02.001.

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