Backstory: Vermont

An internship program placing students at local historical societies.

Run by the UVM College of Arts & Sciences, the Center for Research on Vermont, The Vermont Historical Society, and the UVM History Department.
Who are we?

- College of Arts & Sciences at UVM
- Center for Research on Vermont

Our goal:
- To assist as many students as possible with the internship process.

Our focus:
- Credit
- Funding
- Development of long-term programs (like Backstory: Vermont!)
What is an internship?

An internship is a short-term job at a business, organization or entity that integrates learning in a meaningful way.

Defining factors:
- Integrates classroom learning
- Skills and knowledge learned are transferable
- Has a defined beginning and end
- Clear job description
- Clear goals about what you should learn
- Supervision by a resident ‘expert’ mentor
- Routine feedback from mentor
- At least six weeks in length

Q: What does the Department of Labor consider an internship?
What can interns do?

- Who are these interns?
  - Undergraduate students
  - Could be any major (but probably the humanities)
  - Professional, eager, ready to learn

- What skills do they have?
  - College students today are “digital natives” and have different processes of inquiry than “digital immigrants”
  - Able to work independently and remotely
  - Able to conduct research, think critically, synthesize information
What should a student get out of this?

- The purpose of an internship is for the student to gain work experience, transferable skills and practice producing work that will matter to those outside their university/professor.

Just working alongside you and your team offers a learning opportunity!

- **Skills interns gain:** communication, prioritization, streamlining, learning that their work has worth, punctuality, organization, responsibility, data entry, choosing research topics, physical exhibit construction, community outreach, education for diverse audiences... etc.

Celina Rossier, Vermont Historical Society
What does your historical society get out of this?

- Internships are intended to provide a service to a historical society.
  - Completion of long-desired projects
  - New ideas, skills
  - A set of extra hands
  - Life-long connections!

Students David Brandt and Louis Augeri with mentor Steve Terry
Preparing for an intern:

- **Designate a mentor for the intern** (first point of contact, verify hours, review work and provide guidance/assistance)
  - If the historical society does not have a physical space, the mentor should keep in regular phone/email/in-person contact in order to set tasks and responsibilities.
  - The mentor *is not* responsible for teaching the intern about the history of the area. Students will learn through tasks and research they do while completing tasks.
  - The mentor *will* need to impart specific knowledge (technical, background) that is required for the student to complete their work.
    - Ex. How to use PastPerfect most effectively
  - The mentor should complete mid-point and end-of-semester evaluations with the intern to guide the students progress toward professional life.

We support the student on the reflective and academic side, and you support the student with their workflow. If there are any problems, we are there to help!
How does our internship program work?
Create a specific project for your intern

- Having a **well-defined project** in mind will help you attract intern applications and devise a concrete work plan for your intern.

- Consider:
  - What can be done during the course of a 15 week semester? (8-10 hours per week for a total of 120).
  - What can be done without extensive prior knowledge?
  - What would you like to have at your historical society, but don’t have the ability or time to do yourself?

What are your ideas?
Project examples:

- Scanning and organizing photo collections
- Creation of a printed/digital newsletter
- Rehousing a collection
- Digitizing ephemera or genealogical materials
- PastPerfect (or other catalogue) data input
- Creation of an exhibit focusing on a specific element (ex. Music in 1925 Lyndonville).
- Cataloguing and shelving book collection
- Creation of a tour through museum (and record the tour for future guides)
- Creation and development of social media presence and updated website
The intern matching process:

1. Students apply to Backstory: Vermont through the College of Arts & Sciences Internship Program at UVM (rolling deadline).

2. Students meet with Richard Watts to discuss interests and passions.

3. Richard will consult the list of possible internships and put the student in contact with the historical society that best matches the student. (There may be several students vying for a single internship).

4. The historical society speaks with the students and chooses their intern.

5. The intern registers for academic credit through UVM.
What happens when you hire an intern?

1. Creation of work plan:
   - A work plan is similar to a job description, but with more detail.
   - The first step is to define the students internship. Here is what to consider when writing up the intern expectations:
     - What is the project?
     - What are the action-steps toward completion?
     - What does the student want to learn and can that be incorporated into the project?
     - What skills will the student gain?
     - What is the student’s work schedule
     - Professional expectations? (dress, sick-day etiquette, language guidelines, etc.)
     - What does the mentor need to do in order to ensure success? (weekly check-ins, feedback, technical assistance/training, etc.)

2. Sign-off on work plan by Richard Watts (or other faculty offering credit)

3. Set start-date
Academic credit:

- Students who intern through Backstory: Vermont will be enrolled in Richard’s internship course at UVM or in an equivalent course in the History Department.
- They will complete reflective work and learn how to include this experience on their resume/portfolio and discuss it in future job interviews.
- Mentors will complete an evaluation of the intern and their work at the mid-point and end of the semester (mid-March and early-May).
Questions?