Family History Internships at BYU

This handout functions as the syllabus for the History 496R class. Details as to the specific placement and project to be done by the intern are worked out on a case by case basis with the instructor. The student should respond to any emails from the instructor and send a brief email to the instructor as to progress in the internship at mid-semester/term. The reports discussed below are due on the last class day of the semester/term.

Internships (History 496R) which provide exposure to the real working world of the family historian/genealogist are an integral and key part of the BYU family history experience. The basics about that program lie in the answers to several questions:

WHO?

All BYU Family History majors must complete an Internship. The internship is also one of the capstone course electives for Minors, Certificate Candidates and those doing the Family History emphasis in the Bachelor of General Studies.

WHERE?

Literally an internship can be done anywhere in the world. In recent years interns have served in England, Switzerland, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Mexico and other countries all over the world. Each year for four years we have placed a student as a paid intern at the prestigious New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston. Opportunities are available in national facilities in Washington D. C. and in libraries, historical societies and archives with major genealogical interests all over the United States. Many, who need or choose to remain in Utah, serve in an excellent program at the Family History Library in Salt Lake, the world’s premier genealogical research venue. Opportunities are also available to serve at the Utah State Archives, the Utah State Historical Society and the Utah Valley Family History Center in the HBLL at BYU.

In planning where to do the internship two key concepts need to be considered:

1) All internships must relate at least in part to the student’s geographic area of emphasis.

2) The internships should expose the student to the type of family history work in which she or he is interested: research, library work, family history center service, archival work, etc.

WHAT?

Rigorous practical experience in the world of genealogical activity is the key element of an internship. The Intern should plan to spend a minimum of 120 hours plus report writing time for a three credit hour internship. The internship should involve practical experience in the genealogical community beyond the University. Ideally there will be both research and service (indexing, cataloging, etc.) components. The experience should be an intense, in-depth exposure that challenges the students to go beyond what they have learned in the classroom. They work should work under direction of a librarian, archivist or professional genealogist who mentors their experience and spends at least ten hours during the course of the internship instructing and directing the student efforts. Learning from these mentors is a key part of the intern experience.

Recognizing that genealogical professionals contribute to the progress of the field as a whole, Interns are asked to spend about fifteen to twenty percent of the internship time on a special project having lasting value. Past projects have included indexes to key collections or reference books, guides to genealogical use of a special collection, genealogical research guides to a county or province, and access materials to county histories. The special project should be selected by the intern after consultation with the mentor and supervising faculty.

During the internship the student will prepare two or three written reports:
1. Report on the Internship Experience. In a coherent well written report of 2000 words or more the intern will describe in detail the internship experience.

2. Report on the Special Project. 2000 words or more describing the special project done as part of the internship, such as indexing, collection description, reference material creation, etc. In those cases where the special project is a guide or publishable paper, that written material accompanied by a letter of submission would meet this requirement.

In those situations where the mentor or supervising faculty deem it appropriate, the following essay may be added to the requirements or be assigned to replace the second report above if the entire internship is a special project or one is not possible.

3. Beyond-the-Family-History-Library Report. 2000 words or more on using the materials found in the Family History Library to facilitate understanding of and access to one or more collections, archives or libraries located in the geographic area of emphasis. This report might be prepared at the beginning of the internship, if an intern will spending the internship in the geographic area.

WHEN?

The Internship is a capstone course taken in the last year of the BYU family history experience after the geographic area source and history classes and History 480 have been completed. The selection and planning of the internship is the individual responsibility of each student. Planning should begin early in the Family History career in consultation with the faculty member who teaches in that students area of emphasis and the Family History Coordinator. With advanced planning, the student can arrange funding (where needed), take appropriate classes and plan for the concentrated time necessary for an internship. That type of planning will make the internship an integral part of the total educational experience in Family History.

MENTORS

As early as the first interview with the family history coordinator the student should begin to consider the idea of what internship experience would best meet her/his needs and circumstances. Early planning is the key to having the best internship experiences. During the planning and completion of the internship, the student will have the direction and assistance of three mentors:

1) a librarian, archivist or professional genealogist who mentors the experience and provides a written evaluation to the grading faculty member. The work of this on-site person or persons is crucial to the success of the intern. The on-site mentor(s) will spend at least 10 to 20 hours over the course of the internship instructing and working with the intern, as well as providing access to other needed resources. The on site mentor will, at the end of the term or semester, send to the faculty grading supervisor a report evaluating the intern's performance. This report should be a narrative, qualitative evaluation, as, although it may contain a recommendation as to a letter grade, the determination as to the letter grade is the sole responsibility of the faculty grading supervisor.

2) a faculty consultant for the geographic area who will serve as a resource person in selecting and planning the internship and as a potential liaison with librarians, archivists, professional genealogists or other experts in genealogical or historical research in the geographic area.

3) the faculty grading supervisor who is assigned during the particular semester or term when the internship is completed. The student should contact this faculty member when registering during the semester before the internship for final approval of the internship plans.

GRADING

The faculty grading supervisor will review the reports prepared by the intern and the evaluation of the on-site mentor(s) and, possibly taking into account the experiences of other interns in similar situations and discussing the intern’s work with the faculty consultant for the geographic area, assign a letter grade for the internship class.
HOW TO FINANCE?

Internships often disrupt normal employment patterns and for those away from Utah, there are also extra costs associated with travel and living in short term lodging arrangements. Planning for these is the responsibility of the student. While early planning can allow for the use of traditional sources such as funds from saved earnings and assistance from family, other opportunities may also be considered. Each year in the winter semester the Center for Family History and Genealogy offers several scholarships for which interns going away from Utah are given special consideration. Internship special projects may also qualify for ORCA grants. Pell Grants can be used by those who qualify financially, a real possibility for married interns. If application is made early the Study Abroad/International Field Studies office also offers some small scholarships. Most interns travelling overseas or to the eastern United States use a combination of these sources. Internships for credit are not paid, but some interns work extra hours beyond the 120 hours required and those can be compensated, if the on-site mentor offers that opportunity. The annual internship at the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston is an example of that type of opportunity.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?

Contact the Family History Coordinator: George Ryskamp, at 801-422-8047 or ryskamp@byu.edu.