



Article

**Mentored Learning in Special Collections:
Undergraduate Archival and Rare Books Internships**

Maggie Gallup Kopp
Brigham Young University

John M. Murphy
Brigham Young University

Abstract

Though many special collections libraries and archives mentor graduate student interns, L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Brigham Young University's unique internship program primarily serves undergraduate students. Fuelled by a strong university mandate to promote undergraduate learning and scholarship, Perry Special Collections seeks to nurture undergraduates with interests in archives and rare books. This article describes the genesis and current structure of the undergraduate student internship program, and how it enriches students and the special collections professions.

In the fields of archives and special collections librarianship, internships are an accepted method of learning, and are integrated into the curriculum of graduate programs. According to Bastian and Webber (2008), “completion of one or more internships continues to be a mainstay of formal graduate archival education and remains a component of all such programs in the United States” (p. 13). Professional associations like the Society of American Archivists (SAA, 2011) and the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries (RBMS, 2010) both promote internships as a useful part of graduate education and training. Often, internship programs hosted by special collections libraries serve the needs of graduate students pursuing an MLS or other degrees.

At L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Brigham Young University (BYU) in Provo, Utah, the internship program focuses on training and mentoring undergraduates rather than graduate students. This emphasis on undergraduate mentoring is a distinctive feature of the academic culture at BYU. BYU is the largest private university in the United States, with an enrollment of 32,980 students in 2011. The University is primarily an undergraduate institution, with a 2011 graduate population of 3,096 students. One of the unique goals of our institution is to provide undergraduate students with graduate-level learning and research experiences. For the last several years, BYU has been listed by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago’s Survey of Earned Doctorates as ranking among the top ten universities in the nation for the number of undergraduate students going on to receive doctoral degrees (Askar, 2011).

University administrators have asked all BYU faculty to provide mentoring opportunities to undergraduate students. Several programs on campus, including the Office of Research and Creative Activities, “encourage and support research, creative activities and other expressions of academic scholarship” across the university (ORCA, 2011). In BYU’s Harold B. Lee Library, administrators, library faculty, and human resource personnel are also committed to supporting the university’s goal through mentoring, research grants, and formal internships. University Librarian Julene Butler has noted that since “there is such emphasis for everyone at BYU to be engaged in giving students opportunities for deep research,” the library makes a “strong statement” about its commitment to the educational goals of the university by being a place of undergraduate mentoring and research alongside the other academic entities on campus (personal communication, February 22, 2011). L. Tom Perry Special Collections in the Lee Library seeks to support the university’s goal of mentoring students through our internship program. Our internship program is specifically designed to give undergraduates the chance to explore their research and career interests and to provide opportunities for mentored learning outside a classroom setting.

Another factor influencing the Lee Library’s focus on undergraduate mentoring is that since the discontinuation of the BYU master’s program in library science in 1993, no residential MLS program exists in the state of Utah. For BYU students and Utah residents interested in exploring careers in library science, this absence has been problematic. They have been obligated to pursue educational opportunities outside of the Intermountain West. BYU students have pursued a variety of graduate school

options, including matriculation to distance programs and out-of-state residential programs. Given the large number of libraries and cultural institutions in the state of Utah that hire and otherwise employ individuals with a library science background, the absence of a formal residential library program has been felt across the state. The Lee Library often acts as a point of contact for undergraduates seeking information about education and training in the library field in the absence of a formal degree program on campus, and library internships serve as a way to help prepare interested students for graduate work and careers in librarianship.

For the Lee Library, mentoring undergraduate students who are interested in library careers is seen as an important step towards addressing potential problems in recruitment and succession, since many faculty and staff positions are expected to become vacant in the near future due to retirements and turnover. Internship programs within the library help to build a pool of alumni applicants for future staffing vacancies – in fact, several former interns who have worked in the library have returned to apply for, and fill, positions at the Lee Library (J. Butler, personal communication, February 22, 2011).

About Our Program

In tandem with efforts at the Lee Library, one of our long-term goals in L. Tom Perry Special Collections has been to mentor undergraduate students and other volunteers interested in rare book librarianship and archival studies as possible career choices. Beginning in 2003, archivists and rare book librarians in Special Collections began to notice a significant increase in the number of undergraduates who approached us regarding internship opportunities. Prior to that time we had been approached by an occasional student interested in working in Special Collections, and while we'd always been willing to accommodate those students, their numbers had never been significant enough to justify the formal implementation of an internship program. That all changed in 2003 when we were approached by four students who were interested in special collections internships as well as resume-building experiences in the library. Over the course of the next academic year (2003-2004) we worked with six undergraduate interns from BYU and its sister institution, BYU-Idaho. We also worked with a librarian from a neighboring institution who was tasked with the assignment to establish a special collections and archives program at her own library.

Because of those experiences and the increasing demand by undergraduates to intern in special collections, we formalized our internship program. Currently, we accept between eight and 12 interns per year. A literature review conducted during the beginning phases of our program provided no literature about library internships specifically for undergraduates, though two articles on this topic have since been published by Harwood and McCormac (2008), and Dahl (2011) and the Society of American Archivists has issued a guide of best practices for archival internships (Bastian & Webber, 2008).

Over the course of the last nine years we have hosted 56 student interns. Nearly three quarters (41) of these interns have been undergraduate students. We have also accepted recent graduates and have hosted six students in MLS programs who want to gain experience or credit towards their graduate degree. Apart from student interns, we have worked with nine community volunteers, including collection donors and professionals within our library. While we are happy to host graduate students and other volunteers, first priority for internships is always given to current BYU undergraduates. We strongly believe that internship programs similar to that of the Perry Special Collections are essential training grounds to expose undergraduates to the profession and to the variety of career options within the field, and to help them prepare for postgraduate degrees.

Recruiting Students

A formalized process for admitting interns has evolved over time. Potential interns still approach Special Collections directly, or they are referred to us by the Lee Library's human resources department or the university's Counseling and Career Center. The library human resources department administers the Lee Library's formal, paid internship program for currently-enrolled undergraduates who are interested in pursuing the MLS degree after graduation. We accept some applicants to this program as interns in Special Collections.

Another means for recruiting students is through the internship coordinators in various academic departments across campus, including history, English, and humanities. Academic faculty within those departments are given the assignment of identifying potential internship opportunities for undergraduate students. Students typically receive academic credit for internships through their departments. Generally, faculty internship coordinators have been proactive in directing students to the library and to special collections. For example, in 2011 the BYU history department worked with Special Collections to establish a 15-hour "mini-internship" experience in our department as part of a semester-long academic internship course administered through the history program. Undergraduates have also discovered our internship program through STDEV117, the Career Exploration course offered to first-year students, when they have approached a curator to learn more about careers in libraries for a writing assignment.

Finally, we have a Special Collections internship webpage (<http://lib.byu.edu/sites/sc/policies-services/fellowship-internships/>), first developed in 2004, to advertise and promote our internship program. Surprisingly, few students that we can document have first learned about our internship program through our website. While we need to do a better job of verifying through our exit interview process of how they learned about the internship, anecdotal evidence indicates that our webpage is not a significant tool for recruitment. Part of the reason may be the inaccessibility of the webpage, which is not directly linked to the main Perry Special Collections homepage.

Program Coordination

We have assigned one curator in the department to coordinate our internship program. This individual acts as a point of contact for interested students, facilitates paperwork for interns who are receiving academic credit, and keeps track of which curators are interested in mentoring an intern each semester. Students interested in the Special Collections internship are asked to fill out an application form, located on the internship webpage (see Figure 1), and send it to the internship coordinator along with a resume and cover letter. Students may choose to apply for a Rare Books Internship and/or Archives Internship, depending on their goals and interest. The internship coordinator then recruits other curators in the department who have the desire and capacity to mentor a student to supervise individual interns. As this process suggests, internship opportunities are created on an ad hoc basis each semester depending on curators' time and the availability of projects and workspace for interns. This allows us to accommodate more interns each semester, rather than having interns compete for a fixed number of internships.

**L. TOM PERRY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
HAROLD B. LEE LIBRARY**

APPLICATION FOR VOLUNTEERS AND STUDENT INTERNS

Name:

Date:

Semester requested:

Mailing Address:

Telephone:

Email:

Current major/minor:

I am applying for:

L. Tom Perry Special Collections Archival Internship

L. Tom Perry Special Collections Rare Book Internship

Harold B. Lee Library Conservation Internship

Harold B. Lee Library Exhibition Internship

Will you be receiving academic credit for this internship? If yes, please list the amount of credit hours and the name and contact information of the internship advisor in your academic program.

Please send this form along with a resume and cover letter describing what you hope to learn in your internship, and any prior relevant education and experience you may have, to the Special Collections Internship Coordinator:

Figure 1. L. Tom Perry Special Collections internship application.

When we first began the internship program, several of our staff worked with multiple interns at the same time. In one case, a manuscripts curator supervised three interns during one semester. Department administrators, desiring to provide more opportunities for curators to work with interns as well as to limit the impact that supervising interns would have on curator workloads, initiated a policy review of the internship program in 2005. Policies were changed to limit the number of interns to two per curator, per semester, and curators were encouraged to have their interns sample work in other areas of the department during the course of their internship.

Once accepted into the internship program, potential interns are required to complete a series of forms. Interns fill out a volunteer contract, which mirrors the contract required for Special Collections employees. A photo is taken of the intern and kept as part of their permanent file. Each intern undergoes a background check, as do all employees of Perry Special Collections. Interns sign a confidentiality agreement for working with private materials, ensuring compliance with ethical and professional guidelines for accessing confidential or unprocessed materials guaranteeing privacy of donors and government regulations like the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Interns must also agree to follow a set of employment expectations and policies, including standards for the use of department resources, handling of materials, punctuality, and other department rules. This paperwork is facilitated by the Special Collections department assistant in cooperation with the specific curator who will be supervising the student.

How We Mentor

Interns generally spend 80-120 hours per semester volunteering at Perry Special Collections. These numbers are based on the university's academic internship requirements: if a student is receiving academic credit for an internship, the student must work between 80 and 120 hours during the semester, with the exact number determined by the amount of credits received (1 credit=80 hours, 2 credits=100 hours, 3 credits=120 hours). Special Collections interns typically spend the bulk of their time working with a single curator on one or more projects throughout the semester. Past projects have included: the arrangement and description of archival collections, the creation of exhibits, preservation assessment of rare book collections, creation of bibliographies, scanning items for websites, metadata and cataloging projects, and the encoding of archival finding aids. We have also had several interns work primarily in reference services. Many of these projects require significant training and instruction upfront. Training and instruction is provided by the supervising curator, but interns have the option to participate in department-wide employee training opportunities. Interns may be given instructional readings, worksheets to complete, learning activities, or face-to-face mentoring with their supervisor to help them prepare for specific tasks.

A fundamental difference in working with undergraduate interns as opposed to graduate students in MLS programs is that graduate students have learned many of the theories related to archives and special collections and are seeking hands-on experiences to put theory into practice. Undergraduate interns have no training in these principles. Most of

our undergraduate interns volunteer in Perry Special Collections for the opportunity to explore potential career options or to receive academic credit, and while some may have used Special Collections during their studies, none have received training or instruction in the theories and practices of our profession. This requires supervising curators to provide undergraduates with an introduction to the intellectual foundations of archival studies and librarianship along with the hands-on training interns need to complete assignments and projects.

We have taken two basic approaches to designing mentored experiences for our interns. Some curators have chosen to create standard assignments for every intern they supervise in order to give the interns a broad introduction to the special collections field. One rare books curator typically shares the *ACRL Competencies for Special Collections Professionals* (2008) statement (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/comp4speccollect.cfm>) with interns at the beginning of their internship experiences. This document provides the basis for discussion on learning outcomes for the duration of the internship, and helps the supervisor determine the types of projects individual interns will work on. The statement provides guidelines for the educational and professional competencies expected of special collections professionals and candidates for special collections positions. In familiarizing themselves with these core competencies, interns can gain a greater awareness in the wide range of skills and responsibilities necessary for a successful career in special collections librarianship. The interns are encouraged to examine their own strengths and interest level in each of the fundamental and specialized competencies outlined in the statement, and to identify various aspects of the profession in which they would like to gain greater knowledge and skills. The supervising curator then assigns interns a series of projects which allows them to explore some of the competencies which interest them the most.

The most popular competencies on which interns have chosen to focus have been acquiring skills in collection development, preservation, and promotion and outreach. One supervising curator has designed several tasks which can be used recurrently when interns choose these competencies. Rare books interns have been assigned to survey holdings of a single author in the rare book collections and search for items to acquire or to work on an ongoing preservation assessment survey.

Rare books interns are sometimes assigned to work with exhibits and outreach projects. Perry Special Collections has a robust departmental exhibits program. Each month one curator designs a small, two-case exhibit to highlight an aspect of his or her collecting area. Curators often assign undergraduate interns exhibits to design and produce. The interns select items for the exhibit, write exhibit captions, and set up the exhibit for display. Publicity and signage for the exhibit is generally handled by library staff. These small exhibits especially challenge interns' research and writing skills and get them thinking about how to present and interpret book objects to a broad audience. Creating and researching exhibits has been a rewarding task for interns interested in acquiring skills in promotion and outreach, especially because the activity results in a tangible, marketable product.

Rare books interns are also involved with larger library exhibits. They assist with registrar duties, helping to assess the condition of books before and after display, and logging books in and out for major library exhibits. Rare books interns are also given the opportunity to assist a rare books curator with class presentations to observe the skills needed for teaching and outreach.

On the other hand, for manuscript curators, much of the workload assigned to their archival interns is more project-based and provides an in-depth experience focusing on one aspect of the special collections profession. In this approach, interns typically work on a single project, such as arranging and describing an archival collection or creating an exhibit. Archival interns are required to become familiar with arrangement and descriptive tools such as Archivists' Toolkit (<http://www.archiviststoolkit.org/>), and descriptive and cataloging standards such as *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS) or *Rules for Archival Description* (RAD).

To help interns become more familiar with DACS cataloging protocol and procedures, as well as to introduce them to standard arrangement and description techniques and methods, manuscript processing interns are required to participate in student training sessions. These sessions are required of all undergraduate archival student employees in Perry Special Collections, and interns join student employees in receiving instruction from the special collections metadata librarian and cataloger. In these semester-long training modules, interns learn to arrange and describe manuscript and archives collections using Archivists' Toolkit. These weekly sessions require interns to master basic archival core competencies regarding the arrangement and description of archival materials. Before archives interns and student employees are allowed to participate in the next training session they must pass a short online quiz demonstrating their knowledge of these competencies and skills. Although some of our interns were at first hesitant to participate in these training sessions alongside student employees, they have almost universally acknowledged the benefit of this type of training and instruction.

In addition to this formal training, interns also are required to complete a series of readings on archival theory and methodology. Archives interns report that these readings are especially helpful in providing a broader intellectual context for them to understand the history of the profession as well as underlying theories and methodologies for the work they do in their internship. In addition to completing assigned readings manuscript interns are also required to write a 500-word review essay on any exhibit in which manuscript or archival material was used. Often interns believe that manuscript and archival documents are of use only to historians or genealogists. By exploring the use of primary source materials in an exhibit context, students come away with a broader understanding of the value of these materials to individuals and communities.

Over the course of their semester-long internship, students typically complete one—possibly two—manuscript arrangement and description projects. Archivists in Perry Special Collections attempt to identify projects which can be completed in one

semester. We have found that student interns like to participate in projects that they can complete in one semester or less. Interns appreciate having a register or finding aid to a manuscript collection in hand that is available in paper format or online to show a future employer or highlight in a graduate school application.

Once Rare Book and Archival Interns have completed their training and major assignments (typically towards the end of the internship), they are given the opportunity to explore other areas of the Special Collections department. These activities include shadowing reference and/or collections management staff, working with cataloging and metadata faculty, interviewing a curator from a different area of the department than their supervisor, and shadowing employees of the library's digital imaging lab. Interns may choose to rotate through all areas of the department or to focus on one or two activities. Through exposure to other areas of Special Collections, interns gain a broader understanding of the department's functions and how the training and experience they have gained during their internship is integrated into the mission and operations of Perry Special Collections and the Lee Library.

Evaluating Interns

There are two types of evaluation which occur during the internship. If a student is receiving academic credit, the faculty internship advisor in the student's department will provide a letter grade which is in a large part determined by the supervising curator in special collections, as well as by a formal written report which the intern submits to the advisor in the academic department. Evaluation procedures for interns not receiving academic credit are more informal.

We have been very strong in providing evaluations when interns receive academic credit, but less systematic when interns are volunteering. We have begun requiring all interns to complete written evaluations about their internship experiences. Evaluation forms ask the interns to reflect on their successes and challenges during the internship and answer specific questions about the quality of their training, their initial orientation, and the strengths and weaknesses of their internship supervisor (see Figure 2). Unfortunately we have not always been consistent in requiring interns to submit these forms. Internship supervisors are also encouraged to submit narrative evaluations of their interns to the Special Collections Internship Coordinator to be included in the interns' permanent files.

- Were you able complete your assigned project(s) on time? If not, explain why.
- Was the project(s) you worked on the one(s) originally described to you?
- Evaluate your relationship with your supervisor.
- Did your assigned work space meet the needs of your project?
- Describe your initial orientation to Perry Special Collections and to your project. Was it adequate?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of your internship?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of your internship supervisor?
- What did you learn about the archival profession and professional culture from your intemship?
- Describe some of the challenges you found during this internship.
- Did the archival training you completed help you during this experience? What do you wish you had learned before this internship?
- What changes would improve internships at Perry Special Collections? Please explain your answer.
- Would you recommend the internship program to other students? Explain.

Figure 2. Representative questions from internship experience evaluation forms.

Given the format of our evaluation forms it is impossible for us to quantify in any meaningful way internship experiences in Perry Special Collections. To this point in time students have only been required to provide narrative responses in the evaluation forms. In terms of favorable responses from interns, students have reported that they enjoy the workplace and are excited to work directly with rare and unique primary source materials. A recent intern noted, “hands-on experience is the best learning tool.” Undergraduate students learn to analyze primary source materials in a manner that is typically accessible only to graduate students and faculty members at most universities. They also gain greater mastery of library resources and research strategies. They appreciate working in a warm, friendly, collegial professional environment and enjoy working behind the scenes to promote library operations.

Some students become more aware of ways to connect their internship experience with their future career goals. This has been true not only of students planning on going into library or archival work, but of students planning on studying education, the law, and other disciplines. Another recent intern commented, “it doesn’t matter what your interests are . . . there [are Special Collections materials] here that can teach you more about it.” And for students especially interested in pursuing an MLS, the internship provides useful experience and education before they go on to graduate programs. These students are appreciative of having concrete examples of library work experience to list on MLS program applications, such as a completed finding aid or a small exhibit.

Conclusion: Perspectives on Mentoring

Mentoring can be a significant commitment of our time, but BYU curators appreciate working with young people and providing meaningful educational opportunities for undergraduates outside the classroom environment. Many campus degree programs encourage students to participate in internships and study abroad programs, but not all students have the ability or wherewithal to travel to Washington, D.C., London, Japan, Mexico City, or Africa. What we have learned is that students do not necessarily need to travel to distant locales; internships in cultural institutions like special collections libraries located on campus can provide students with valuable learning opportunities in their own communities. As curators, we enjoy sharing our excitement about working with primary source material and helping interns make their own connections and discoveries. In fact, many students have commented that their experiences in special collections have been just as valuable, if not more so, than their classroom experiences in making history “come to life” for them. It’s one thing to read about an event in world or American history in a textbook but an entirely different experience to read a primary source document such as a journal, scrapbook, letter, or other record from an individual who experienced that event. For undergraduates, access to primary source materials is transformative. We have found that students who work with primary source documents are better able to evaluate and search for relevant information among the flood of digital and print sources in our contemporary environment.

Another rewarding aspect of working with interns is the opportunity mentoring gives us to promote the library and archival professions. Mentoring undergraduates gives us new perspectives; it allows us to find out what matters to students in terms of our collections and how to best convey the relevance of rare books and manuscript materials in a digital age. As curators, we love our profession and wish to see it grow and develop and be relevant to future generations. By working with students with outstanding analytic, linguistic, and technical competence, we can help assure that our profession will enjoy a bright future. It is imperative for all library professionals, regardless of their responsibilities, to reach out to and mentor individuals who are interested in our profession if it is to remain relevant and vibrant in the future. While some of our undergraduate interns may go on to MLS programs, many will not. By creating meaningful internship experiences for our students and volunteers, at the very least we will engender goodwill for our profession and create future ambassadors for our institutions and for our professional role in society.

References

- Askar, J. G. (2011, August 27). BYU is Top-5 launching pad for PhDs. *Deseret News*. Retrieved from <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700174074/BYU-is-Top-5-launching-pad-for-PhDs.html>
- Bastian, J.A. & Webber, D. (2008). *Archival Internships: A Guide for Faculty, Supervisors, and Students*. Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists.
- Brigham Young University, Office of Research and Creative Activities (2011). Retrieved from <http://orca.byu.edu/>
- Canadian Council of Archives (2008). *Rules for Archival Description*. Retrieved from http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/RAD/RADComplete_July2008.pdf
- Dahl, C. (2011). Creating Undergraduate Internships for non-LIS Students in Academic Libraries. *Collaborative Librarianship* 3 (2), 73-78.
- Harwood, H. & McCormac, C. (2008). Growing Our Own: Mentoring Undergraduate Students. *Journal of Business and Finance Librarianship* 13 (3), 201-215.
- Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, Association of College and Research Libraries. (2010). Educational Opportunities: A Directory. Retrieved from http://www.rbms.info/committees/membership_and_professional/educational_opportunities/index.shtml
- Society of American Archivists. (2008). *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*. Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists.

Maggie Kopp is Curator of Rare Books at L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. She holds a master's degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Texas and a master's degree in Medieval Studies from Fordham University. She currently serves as Chair of the Utah Library Association's Archives, Manuscripts, and Special Collections Round Table.

John Murphy is Curator for 20th Century Western and Mormon Manuscripts in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. He has a master's degree in Library and Information Science from Simmons College and a master's degree in History from Brandeis University. He is past president of the Conference of Intermountain Archivists, past president of the SAA Security Roundtable, past member of the SAA Ethics Committee, and past member of the SAA Standards Committee.

©2012, M. Kopp, J. Murphy. *Journal of Library Innovation* is an open access journal. Authors retain the copyright to their work under the terms of the following Creative Commons license: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 (United States) <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/>