

Internships in American Studies

What is an internship? An internship is a supervised apprenticeship for students. We have two types: AM ST 575 is an internship specifically in a museum. AM ST 595 is an internship typically in a heritage or governmental organization such as an archives, administrative agency, research group, or festival organization. An intern, like an apprentice, is learning some of the skills required in a profession, as well as receiving experience in an institutional environment. An internship gives you the chance to gain work experience as you earn academic credits. It gives you independence and responsibilities outside the classroom. It may even let you get your foot in the door where you want to be employed.

What are some examples? Recently, our Penn State Harrisburg students catalogued records at the State Archives, the York County Heritage Trust, a local church, and the Military History Institute; they accessioned and curated artifacts at the Commonwealth Conservation Center, the Reading Museum, and the State Museum; they designed and installed exhibits at the Mifflinburg Buggy Museum, the Lancaster Heritage Center, and the Museum of Civil War Medicine; they developed and implemented educational programs for the Landis Valley Museum and the Hershey Museum; and they produced web-based instructional materials for the Bureau of Historic Preservation. They have worked at major venues such as the Archives of American Art and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. As you can see, interns have worked not only in museums and archives, but also in non-profit organizations and governmental bodies. The key is that the internship site and its activities be clearly related to a student's academic program and career goals.

What would not qualify as an internship? An assignment where the experience is less than professional would not be acceptable as an internship. For example, you would not want to be working as a clerk, doing the same thing day after day and not learning any advanced skills. Neither should an intern be simply a tour guide, a docent, or a volunteer. While such positions are vital to the operations of an institution, they do not make for satisfactory internships because they do not normally involve the necessary responsibility, authority, and educational opportunities. However, if you would propose to be a leader in the training or management of guides, docents, and volunteers, or if you were to design new educational programs or materials for them to present to the public, then that could be an acceptable internship assignment. If you are currently employed at an institution, you are not eligible for an internship at that same institution.

Are there eligibility requirements? If you are a graduate student, you should have 18 credits completed. All students must have the advance approval of the American Studies Internship Coordinator and the Program Coordinator.

How many credits can be earned? Internships count for three credits. The program's practice has been not to allow six credits for a single internship and not to allow a student more than one internship.

How much does an internship cost? The tuition rates for undergraduate and graduate internship credits are the same as those for other undergraduate and graduate course credits.

Can interns get paid? Occasionally, interns are paid a wage by the institutions where they work. Generally speaking, however, paid internships are rare.

How much time does an internship take? Because an internship is counted the same number of credits as a regular course, it is fair to say that an internship should take about the same amount of your time as a course would. Penn State calculates that in a typical course, a student spends about 3 hours per week in class and about twice that many hours outside class doing homework and research. In a semester, that would be about 45 hours in class and 90 hours outside class. Therefore, you should plan on spending about 135 hours on your internship. That translates to about one eight-hour day per week during a semester, or about two and a half days per week during a six-week summer session. You and your site supervisor can arrange your work schedule to suit your mutual convenience, so long as you total about 135 hours.

How is an internship set up? Typically, students already have a good idea where they want to do their internship, and even what they want to do, before they actually file their internship application. They have usually scouted a site and spoken with the person who supervises interns there. Students who have only a vague idea of where they want to work or what they want to do can get specific advice and referrals from the American Studies program chair. The chair can show you examples of past internships. But it is not the chair's responsibility to escort you to the site and set you up. Indeed, you need to show initiative and take responsibility in finding an internship, just as you will need to show those traits in actually working as an intern. You will need to establish a relationship with the Site Supervisor and work out a clear agreement on your duties and goals. The program chair is available for consultation anytime, and has to approve the details of the arrangement you have set up with the institution where you will intern.

How does a student register for an internship? First, make an appointment to see the American Studies program chair to discuss your plans and the internship requirements. Then fill out the attached application form. If you need another form, you can get it from the American Studies secretary in W356 or you can download it from our American Studies website. On the form, you will need to describe your proposed internship in sufficient detail, including the arrangements you have made with your host institution. You will need to have the signed approval of your Site Supervisor, your adviser, and the Program Chair. Graduate students should check off AM ST 575, Museum Internship if they are working for a museum and AM ST 595 if it is a general internship at a heritage organization. Finally, your completed and approved application should be returned to the staff assistant, who will take care of registering you for the course. You will need to have your application returned before the school term begins or within a week after classes start.

How is an intern graded? The professor of record assigns you a grade at the end of the term in which your project is completed. The grade is based on the professor's inspection of a portfolio of materials you submit that thoroughly documents your internship accomplishments, and on the professor's consultation with your Site Supervisor. The Program Chair will show you examples of successful portfolios when you meet to discuss your internship. The portfolio typically contains a daily journal that you have kept. This journal not only records what you have done, but shows your reflections on your training and work. It will contain copies of any documents

you have used or created. It may contain photographs of your site or your exhibit.

Am I covered by insurance? You are not insured under the university's general liability program covering auto accidents, falls, property damage, and the like. Unpaid interns are not eligible for workmen's compensation if injured. If you are interested, appropriate insurance might be purchased, or your student health insurance or your (or from your parents or partners) homeowner's insurance may provide coverage for you.

Is there anything else to know? You need to realize that, as an intern, while you are not an agent of the university, you are representing Penn State and should behave accordingly. You need to abide by all the regulations that govern the institution and the site where you are interning. If the institution where you are interning wants you to sign any agreements in advance, you should bring these to us for legal review, as they may try to commit you or the university to inappropriate responsibilities. In sum, if any problems along these lines arise, or if you anticipate any problems, consult with your Site Supervisor and professor of record immediately.

American Studies Internship Application (Complete in Word Processing)

- _____ AM ST 495 Internship (Undergraduate Students)
_____ AM ST 575 Museum Internship (graduate students)
_____ AM ST 595 Internship (graduate students)

Date of application _____

Academic Term for which internship is scheduled _____

Number of credits registered for (normally 3) _____

Your name _____ PSU ID# _____

Local mailing address _____

Local phone and e-mail address _____

Grade point average and credits completed _____

Your Academic adviser _____

Internship site, street address, URL, and contact information

Brief description of proposed internship _____

(Include a description of your proposed internship, including the tasks you will accomplish and the skills you will acquire. INCLUDE THE WORK SCHEDULE with planned supervisor meetings and your anticipated completion date. Include a bibliography of works you may need to consult during your training. Attach a brochure for the site if available.)

Site Supervisor's name _____

Site Supervisor's mailing address _____

Site Supervisor's phone and e-mail address _____

Approval signatures:

Student's Adviser _____

Professor of Record _____

Site Supervisor _____

American Studies Program Chair _____

School of Humanities Director _____