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Justin Bridges
Kent State University

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Preservation Essentials

Assistant Editor: William Modrow, Miami University. Please contact William at modrowwm@miamioh.edu if you would like to guest author a column or have a good idea to share.

Preservation Internship: To Do or Not to Do?

By Justin Bridges, Kent State University

This summer I completed an internship in the Miami University Libraries Preservation and Conservation Department; this was one of the final requirements for my master's of library and information science degree from Kent State University. While I have noticed a positive change in myself after my internship experience, that change did not come easily!

I was aware of the internship options in my library program and speculated whether this would be a viable opportunity and, more important, how I could fit the internship into my already hectic schedule. I inquired about the prospect and what actual internships were available. I discussed my possibilities with library faculty, peers in my program, and a few librarians I knew to decide whether an internship in a preservation lab would give me the hands-on experience I desired while interacting with the functions of a preservation program in a library.

To complete this Culminating Experience Internship successfully, my program required a minimum of 150 hours of documented work within an information institution. Having completed my entire MLIS degree program in under a year, I thought this final requirement sounded both easy and fun! Perhaps a constant state of exhaustion induced by many late night studying binges caused this momentary lapse of sanity, but upon further contemplation I realized that this 150-hour internship would need to be fulfilled in a relatively short 13-week summer term . . . and in addition to my regular 40-hour work week. Pair that with the fact that I am a nontraditional student (read as . . . I'm old), all of a sudden this whole internship idea didn't sound so easy and fun after all.

However, knowing that the internship was a requirement in achieving my ultimate goal of receiving an MLIS degree, I contacted the preservation librarian at Miami University and together we began constructing a challenging and attainable set of objectives and goals agreeable to my library program adviser. Once these objectives were in place, my internship schedule was established and I was ready to go! Immediately, I realized that the material I learned in my coursework could be applied with the training I received from the preservation librarian. Thus, over the next 13 weeks, I was able to apply all of the knowledge I had gained through my online preservation courses in a hands-on

environment within the confines of a state-of-the-art preservation lab. Having the opportunity to implement the industry best practices that I had learned through my online coursework was a truly amazing opportunity. In addition to practicing various preservation basics such as book repair, disaster planning, and digital preservation initiatives, I was also able to learn several "tricks of the trade" from an experienced preservation librarian. I was tasked with "rehousing" projects and evaluating preservation needs of general collections materials and many materials from special collections and the archives. I was immersed in all forms of preservation tools and was consulted on the preparation of an exhibition—an amazing opportunity and something I had never experienced before.

Being treated as an aspiring colleague and not so much as a "newbie" made me feel comfortable asking questions; moreover, this opportunity to serve not only as an intern but also as a mentee, allowed me to gain a plethora of insights into the field of preservation librarianship that I could never have learned in an online classroom. The mentor/mentee relationship generated through this experience turned out to be an invaluable tool in my overall professional development. In fact, the many relationships that I developed with other librarians both inside the institution and abroad during this practicum allowed me to form a network of professionals that I will most surely reach out to for professional guidance in the future.

While I had looked forward to the opportunity to practice hands-on preservation applications and techniques through this internship, the little surprises that crept in along the way were perhaps most exciting. For example, within the first week of my internship, my on-site adviser presented me with the opportunity to develop and teach a continuing education class on cultural heritage preservation entitled *Preserving the Past for the Future*. I designed the class for 12 to 15 participants and outlined the basics of book, paper, and photographic preservation. Beginning with a lecture, the class culminated in an educational interactive exercise that enabled participants to execute simple restoration and preservation techniques on vintage photos they had brought with them. Engaging the participants throughout the entirety of the three-hour class session and teaching them how to preserve their valuable keepsakes was almost as rewarding as their request for me

to teach a preservation course the following term. Having the opportunity to teach others about a topic about which I am so passionate was quite a wonderful surprise, and it allowed me to extend my knowledge of preservation beyond the confines of the library. Outreach to the community was an unexpected but much appreciated element of my internship.

Working my regular job from 8 am to 5 pm, transitioning into my intern role from 5 pm to 8 pm, then traveling home to put in an additional two to three hours of homework each night did prove exhausting, but was all very well worth it in the end. Pairing the hands-on experience that I gained through the internship with the excellent academic coursework provided through my degree program, I feel that I am ready to embrace my future career as a confident and well-prepared preservation librarian. Even though my approach may not suit everyone, I recommend that future MLIS students reach out to any or all internship opportunities and institutions available to share their experience and knowledge in preparing librarians for the professional realm. This internship experience allowed me to boost my professional skill set and to revitalize my motivation to accomplish any goals that I set for myself, and it inspired me to be the best preservation librarian that I can possibly be. In short, my summer spent as an intern in the Miami University Libraries Preservation and Conservation Department was truly a life-changing experience. For that, I will be forever grateful to my wonderful site supervisor and mentor, to all of the other librarians, and to the friends I have made on this fantastic journey.

2018 Emeritus Scholarship Winner Gives Thanks

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My participation in the “Diversity and Inclusion in the Archives Field” forum allowed me to learn about the individual and institutional struggles to overcome unbalanced hiring practices and to foster welcoming environments for all. It was heartening to hear discussions about the need for increased diversity among archives staff and inclusive representation within our collections. The “De-Centering Whiteness in the Archives” session was really informative. In particular, Kelly Bolding’s presentation on Princeton’s project to remediate racist descriptions in legacy finding aids was especially powerful. She emphasized that removing discriminatory language can be part of routine data cleanup, thus coupling reparative processing with iterative processing and taking meaningful action to counter the widespread imbalances in our historical records.

This past summer, I left Kentucky for Los Angeles, where I am now a special collections archivist at the Getty Research Institute. Though I am no longer a resident midwesterner, I look forward to staying connected to MAC and will continue to follow from afar the news of my midwestern colleagues. I am truly grateful to MAC and the Emeritus Scholarship Committee for giving me the opportunity to attend the 2018 Midwest Archives Conference—I hope to see many of you at future archives conferences!