

IATL Academic Fellowship

Final Project Report

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1. Project Title:

Enhancing the Student Experience: Internships and Placements for Historians Taking a New Second-Year Core Module called 'Doing History'.

2. Activities

This project has explored the potential for linkages between academic learning and vacation work placements in the context of an area where such developments are unconventional: a history department core undergraduate module.

The broad context here was a major rethinking of the History Department undergraduate curriculum taking place in 2011-12, and implemented in 2012-13. At the centre of this was our creation of a new core module for single honours and joint degree students, which was brought on stream in October 2012: this in fact (after much reflection) has been (re)named *Making History*, and now forms part of the first, rather than second-year curriculum.

Making History is not, and was not intended to be, a conventional 'skills' module. Rather the aim, as the module title implies, is to provide an introduction to all aspects of the 'making' of history, from the processes of research in engagement with primary sources, to the presentation, dissemination, manipulation and consumption of historical interpretation. The intention is to encourage students to consider how different types of sources help us recover different perspectives, and also to think critically around how stories about the past are constructed and presented, both to other historians and more widely in society (for example, through television, film and historical fiction, and in the museum and heritage sector). Students taking this module will thus be equipped to look for the imprint of history beyond the lecture hall and the academic text. The approach

here is also noticeably 'hands-on' – students are expected to practice as well as study the construction of history through the creation of a research project presented in digital format. This comprises the presentation of the research findings themselves (as either an online essay or a webpage-embedded podcast), as well as an e-portfolio with project outline and a reflective learning log.

The scope, ambition and innovative assessment methods of *Making History* has meant that the History department, in addition to its own teaching resources, has drawn on a wide range of advice and support from within the university in the creation and delivery of this module. Colleagues from E-Lab have been involved in sessions on the creation of e-portfolios, and there has been extensive input from the staff of the Modern Records Centre, which serves as a wonderful local example to students of how historical materials are gathered and presented, as well as a practical resource for their projects.

Yet at the centre of this project has been another aspect of inter-departmental co-operation and collaboration: with the Student Careers and Skills service. From the outset, our intention was to offer students taking this module the possibility of a subsequent vacation placement with a group or institution (whether gallery, museum, stately home or media organization) involved with public history in some broad sense. Students would bring to the placement the experience and understanding they had gained on the module, and apply it in some appropriate manner, benefitting both themselves and their hosts, whether that was through assisting in the setting up of an exhibition, playing a part in conservation or cataloguing projects or in a multitude of potential other ways. It was specifically to explore the potentials, and pitfalls, in this area that the application was made to IATL.

Over the latter part of 2011, Peter Marshall (the fellowship holder, and History Department Director of Undergraduate Studies) met extensively with Professor Mark Knights, the module leader-designate of *Making History*, to refine the optimal relationship between the emergent taught curriculum and the envisaged placements. Once the decision had been taken that *Making History* needed to be a first- rather than second-year module, it became clear to us that any such placements that they would need to take place in the long vacation between first and second-year, and that, while we would not be able to offer them to all students, we would aim to provide them for around 30 of the cohort, ideally on a continuous and rolling basis, and by some form of competitive application. During this period, we approached Helen Clifford, a research assistant attached to the History Department, and herself a museum curator in Yorkshire, to take on the role of identifying and contacting potential partners, and with her invaluable assistance we began the construction of a database of potential placement sites.

Unfortunately, at the start of 2012, Helen's other commitments would not allow her to carry on with this role, and we were required to rethink the planning of the project. At this stage, however, we were able to bring into our discussions Marjorie Walsh, Arts consultant with the Careers Service, who immediately saw the potential for fruitful collaboration in this area. Marjorie alerted us to the creation of the new Placements Unit within the Careers Service, and introduced us to the recently-appointed Placements Officer for Arts, Kimberley Counsell. Marjorie and Kimberley were soon integral to the planning of this aspect of the new module, not least by alerting us to the existence of the Warwick Work Experience Bursary Scheme (WWEBS), which supports unpaid work experience for Warwick students, and by steering us away from the language of internships (which have distinct legal and financial implications) and towards those of

placement. Inheriting the database of contacts begun by Helen, they have been able to help us considerably expand and develop it.

At this stage we made some key strategic decisions: that we should focus on identifying collaborators within the West Midlands region (and in London), and that we should proactively initiate direct contact with them by inviting as many as possible to an outreach event. This took place on 22 June 2012, in the pleasant surroundings of the Atrium of the Maths Building, and was a notable success, attended by over 30 delegates from museums, galleries and heritage organizations from the region as well as a wide-cross section of members of the history department, including research fellows, postgraduate and undergraduate students. Rather than subject our guests to a succession of formal 'presentations', we opted instead for a primarily social occasion, with a seated buffet supper and many opportunities for informal networking and interaction. Billed as a 'get to know each other occasion', we prepared display stands and consultative materials on the widest possible range of the History Department's activities, and made it clear that we were eager to discuss the possibilities for collaborations of all sorts, and that no one at this stage was being expected to make any kind of formal commitment to providing undergraduate placements. Nonetheless, the genuine interest in this among our guests was palpable, with a number of them making offers and suggestions on the spot. The challenge going forward is to capitalise effectively on this good will and enthusiasm.

3. Outcomes

The project was always intended to be an exploratory, priming one, contributing to an ongoing effort of curricular and pedagogic development, rather than a self-contained exercise. That means that in some ways it is still too early to enumerate all the outcomes. Yet there is no doubt that the funding it provided has helped to energise and coalesce our activities in relation to this new module. More specifically:

- The preparation of students for placements in the world of museums, archives, heritage and the media has been embedded as a key aim of the Making History Module.
- Colleagues from Student Careers and Skills are directly involved in the delivery of the module
- Leading figures from the arts and heritage sector (for example, Steven Parissien, the Director of Compton Verney) have been invited to address students as an integral part of the module
- There has been active follow-up with the contacts established at the 22 June event, with the intention of making a range of short summer placements available to our students in 2013

The implementation of the aims of the project, and the best ways of carrying them forward is being monitored by Mark Knights and Giorgio Riello as Module Directors of Making History and by Mathew Thomson as new History DUGS (Peter Marshall went on research leave in Oct 2012) as well as by the departmental Teaching and Learning Committee. We will also of course invite feedback through the usual mechanisms of mid-module and end-of-module feedback from students. For us, one of the most valuable aspects of both the project and the new module has been closer and more effective collaboration with Careers and Skills: this is also being carried forward, in the structure of the module itself,

in participation of Careers and Skills colleagues at departmental Council and SSLC meetings, and in a range of more informal ongoing contacts. Mark Knights has also been taking to a range of colleagues across the university about the scope and aims of Making History.

4. Implications

We will not be in a position fully to assess the value of the work we have undertaken until a first wave of module-linked placements has been created and filled, and the students concerned have had an opportunity to reflect and report back on their experience. reflected on their experience. Nonetheless, some important reflections and implications already present themselves. One is that there appears to be real enthusiasm in a variety of places beyond the university for collaboration with academic departments in ways that can potentially enrich the student experience. It is salutary to have been shown that this holds true for subjects such as History which have traditionally been seen as resolutely non-vocational. Additionally, we have been helped to see the potential for embedding into the curriculum, and into student consciousness at an early stage of study, reflection on careers and skills in a way that seems relevant and exciting to undergraduates. For us as a department, the project has helped open our eyes to the wide range of expertise and support that it is possible to draw on within the university, and to the fact that directly pedagogic collaborations need not always be with other subject-based academic departments.

5. References and Contacts

Skills and Careers Work Experience Bursaries:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/scs/experience/bursary/>

Making History Webpage:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/undergraduate/modules/makinghistory/>

Making History Module Directors: Professor Mark Knights and Professor Giorgio Riello

Academic Fellowship Award Holder: Professor Peter Marshall