

Project Reference: 11-12/AF/Marshall

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

INTERIM REPORT

This project has been running closely alongside an overhaul of the History Department undergraduate curriculum in 2011-12, for full implantation in 2012-13. In particular, it has been integral to the thinking around a new core module (now in fact to be called Making History), the aims of which are to encourage students to consider how different types of sources can 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. The module should broaden students' understanding of how history is created and consumed, and will encourage them to look for the imprint of history beyond the lecture hall and the academic text. We will be working closely with the Modern Records Centre in the shaping of student projects, and will also be bringing into the department a range of speakers involved in the presentation of versions of the past in the wider community outside the university.

Our intention is 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, taking part in conservation or cataloguing projects or in a multitude of potential other ways.

Some considerable progress has been made towards realizing these aspirations. The module itself has been devised and approved after intensive discussion with colleagues within the department. It is now to be a first-year rather than, as originally intended, a second year module, as we came to realise its foundational importance for the study of history at undergraduate level, and it is to be taken by all single honours history and joint-degree students. Over the latter part of 2011 I had several meetings with Professor Mark Knights, the module leader of Making History, to refine the optimal relationship between the emergent taught curriculum and the envisaged placements. We established 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, Helen Clifford, a research assistant attached

to the History Department, and herself a museum curator in Yorkshire, took on the role of identifying and contacting potential partners and began the construction of a database of potential placement sites.

Unfortunately, at the start of 2012, Helen decided that her 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, with whom we have been working closely over the past few weeks.

Kimberley and Marjorie, in consultation with myself and Mark, have been developing and expanding the database of contacts begun by Helen, and the History Department has been collaborating closely with the Placements Unit in the planning of a significant outreach event, to be held on campus on 22 June. We are aiming to invite representatives from a wide range of 'heritage' organizations based in the West Midlands and in London (the areas which our investigations to date suggest will be most attractive to students seeking history-related placements). The principal purposes of this occasion will be to forge and cement connections with a range of potential partners, introducing these potential partners to the work of the History Department and to the idea of agreeing to host placements. While nothing can be firmly nailed down at this point, our intention is to follow up with interested contacts at the end of the summer, and to look towards offering placements to the first cohort of Making History students in the summer of 2013.

Aside from the progress towards these specific goals, the project has had the welcome effect of strengthening connections between the History Department and the Careers service, with Kimberley as well as Marjorie meeting a range of colleagues and attending sessions of the History SSLC.

Peter Marshall
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