Transferable Skills and the Nontraditional Workplace:

A Case Study of Internships with an Art and Design Theory-Focused Journal

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Abstract—The author outlines a librarian internship in the virtual, nontraditional context of an open-access scholarly journal and research group called Architecture_MPS (architecture_media_politics_society). This group also organizes academic events and offers research materials in its primary area of study—architecture—and the related fields of art, sociology, and design. The importance of such training opportunities is placed in the context of the changing nature of the workplace and, in particular, the ever-more-difficult job-seeking process for librarians. This type of internship indicates possible ways forward for the training of librarians in the humanities and other fields that could help prepare library students for the workplaces of the future.

INTRODUCTION: THE WORKPLACE CONTEXT TODAY

Recent statistics provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) *Occupational Outlook Handbook 2014* indicate that the librarian job market is shrinking. Of particular concern is a lack of professional librarian positions available for recent graduates. The BLS further predicts that employment for professional librarians for the period between 2012 and 2022 will grow at an annual rate of only 7 percent. This translates to roughly 1,000 new jobs each year, or a total of 11,000 jobs. In contrast, an 11 percent growth rate for all professions is expected over the same period.

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- I. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "Librarians," in Occupational Outlook Handbook, January 8, 2014, http://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/librarians.htm.
- 2. Darcy C. Bosque and Cory Lampert, "A Chance of Storms: New Librarians Navigating Technology Tempests," *Technical Services Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2009): 261–86.
 - 3. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Librarians."

Although no statistics specific to art and humanities librarianship are currently available, they likely do not vary widely from those available for the overall library sector, which Stephanie Maatta, author of annual "Placements and Salaries" reports, sees as increasingly characterized by falling job opportunities. Maatta notes that, of the graduates surveyed from the 2012 class, only 52 percent found employment in permanent professional positions.4 This scenario is also reflected in the Occupational Outlook Handbook for 2014: "Jobseekers may face strong competition for jobs . . . as many people with master's degrees in library science compete for a limited number of available positions. . . . Even though people with a master's degree in library science may have trouble finding a job as a librarian, their research and analytical skills can be valuable for jobs in a variety of other fields, such as market researchers or computer and information systems managers."5

Expanding these arguments in the Canadian context, Melissa Fraser-Arnott examined the transferability of library science skills to positions listed in the Government of Canada job postings. She concluded that MLS graduates can apply outside library science based on the competencies and knowledge they obtained through coursework in the library school program.⁶ Among the competencies she identified were information technology and new information and communication technology skills.⁷ Her conclusions echoed the other reports and surveys on how librarians can best transfer their skills.⁸ For example, numerous representatives of MLS programs report that their graduates are increasingly being hired into emerging technology roles, such as digital content manager and emerging technology specialist, in which new information science skills are essential.9 The literature on employability indicates that, in response to increasing difficulties in finding employment, all librarians, whether art-focused or not, are seen as seeking to transfer their skills to other workplaces. Central to this trend is their particular use and knowledge of new technologies.

WHAT IS ARCHITECTURE_MPS? WHAT IS THE INTERNSHIP?

The scholarly journal and research group of the same name, Architecture_MPS, runs a librarian internship program that offers library science students and recent graduates the opportunity to intern in the publishing field. 10 Architecture_MPS is entirely virtual. It seeks to develop collaborations between librarians and academics, it publishes open-access online articles monthly, and it employs a team of information professionals. These individuals engage in various tasks related to the journal and the

^{4.} Stephanie L. Maatta, "Placements and Salaries 2013: The Emerging Databrarian: Digital and Data Management Roles Reach Critical Mass among Recent LIS Graduates," Library Journal 138, no. 17 (2013), http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2013/10/placements-and -salaries/2013-survey/the-emerging-databrarian/#_

^{5.} Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "Librarians Job Outlook," in Occupational Outlook Handbook, January $8, \verb|2014|, http://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/librarians.htm|| \verb|4tab-6|.| \\$

^{6.} Melissa Fraser-Arnott, "Library and Information Science (LIS) Transferable Competencies," Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library & Information Practice & Research 8, no. 2 (2013): 1-32.

^{8.} These include Maatta, "Emerging Databrarian"; Bosque and Lampert, "Chance of Storms"; and Vandana Singh and Bharat Mehra, "Strengths and Weaknesses of the Information Technology Curriculum in Library and Information Science Graduate Programs," Journal of Librarianship and Information Science 45, no. 3 (2013): 219-31.

^{9.} Maatta, "Emerging Databrarian."

^{10. &}quot;About," Architecture_MPS, http://architecturemps.com/about/.

affiliated research programs. Run by academics, these programs focus on housing design and provision on one hand and the role of new technologies in the design and representation of cities on the other. Architecture_MPS represents a workplace for students and recent graduates that differs significantly from the academic or public library setting and falls under the category of "nontraditional" as outlined by Maata.

In this setting, the journal's librarian collaborators use the tools and technologies of librarianship to support the academic publication and the collection and dissemination of scholarly news and materials. The work and communication are done remotely. Of most interest in the context of this article, however, is the fact that Architecture_MPS also developed an intern structure that is run as a for-credit program (with a not-for-credit option as well) for American Library Association-accredited library schools.

As indicated in the "Placements & Salaries 2013" report, an increasing number of librarians are working (and will work) outside the academic or public library setting and will transfer their skills to a wider range of roles. In fact, graduates accepting positions outside the library and information science field increased from 9.5 percent of 2012 placements to 12.1 percent in 2013. Reflecting this trend, the internship discussed here involves participants in a variety of work tasks that can be broken down into four categories: research support to academics, managing a repository of research materials, metadata creation, and outreach through social media. All of these components of typical art librarian roles manifest themselves in clearly recognizable ways in the context of this internship.

Interns locate materials required by Architecture_MPS authors, editors, and researchers for their articles, books, and events, much like a standard research support role within an academic library or museum/gallery library. The main difference here is that communication is largely through e-mail, and the resources searched and used are entirely electronic. Interns are also involved in compiling materials for the journal's Resource Repository, including current event listings, book reviews, and relevant exhibition and film listings. Because this is a continually updated research guide, all of these materials need to be evaluated and cataloged—skills that again are learned in library school but applied here in a slightly different context.

Some of the materials collected for this repository will be sent for archiving to relevant international bodies, such as the Library of Congress and the British Library, in the coming years. This involves another component of this internship: metadata creation using non-MARC coding for materials and images specifically for archiving with external institutions. This process currently occurs in the context of support for a research project hosted by the journal that examines the historical and contemporary use of architecture in political campaign images—whether they be historical portraiture or contemporary televisual images of politicians. Specifically, this project

^{11.} Maatta, "Emerging Databrarian."

^{12.} The academic librarian initiative led to funding from the American Library Association for the creation of research materials. These were published in 2015 and are posted at http://architecturemps.com/guides/.

^{13.} Maatta, "Emerging Databrarian."

^{14.} Stephanie L. Maatta, "Placements & Salaries 2014: Renaissance Librarians," *Library Journal* 139, no. 17 (October 15, 2014): 26, http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2014/10/placements-and-salaries/2014-survey/renaissance-librarians/.

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involves finding relevant images and adding metadata. Again, the overlap between the role of the cataloger/archivist/reference librarian in a traditional art library setting and the slightly modified work performed in this context are indicative of how art librarians are able to transfer their skills in a specifically electronic and remote nontraditional context.

Interns also become involved in outreach through the use of social media. 15 This includes sourcing and selecting news stories relevant to the journal's themes, information on events, new books, and publications that may be of interest to the journal's readers. In many ways this equates to what is described as a social media-generated resource. However, it also correlates to more standard definitions of outreach that are always part of the librarian role, whether or not they are art librarians.

Finally, some interns have been asked to evaluate which platform is most suitable for hosting the journal's content. Under guidance, these interns are exploring whether the journal's needs can be accommodated on a WordPress platform or whether it is preferable to migrate to Open Journal Systems (OJS). The decision involves factors such as navigability and user experience in addition to aesthetics.

THE LIBRARIAN INTERN—PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

As mentioned above, the Architecture_MPS internship is offered in two models: for-credit and not-for-credit. Both programs, however, focus on helping interns develop their library skills and showing them how to adapt such skills to this related, but different, context. In this case, the differences revolve around the internship requiring working remotely, its need for researching and communicating exclusively online, its preparation of materials for use by a non-student and non-academic audience, and working to the tight and continual deadlines of the art and architecture publishing sector. In this context, knowledge of new and emerging information and communication technologies is central for success.

As with many subject librarian positions, knowledge of the art and design areas of the journal is very useful to the intern librarian. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to attract interns with this background. The attributes of the interns operating in this context are fairly standard: an eye for detail, an ability to be proactive, sound judgment, good analytical abilities, and the ability to communicate effectively. However, in this context one personal attribute becomes critical to success: time management. Working remotely and without direct supervision, interns quickly need to adapt to a new work experience, often while juggling school and other commitments.

Twenty-three former and current interns who had completed at least four months with Architecture_MPS were contacted via e-mail and invited to share their thoughts for this article. They were asked to write a paragraph or two in response to the following open-ended questions:

I. Did the Architecture_MPS internship help you get a job? If so, in what way (describe relevant skills and experiences)?

^{15.} Architecture_MPS interns assist in creating content for Pinterest, Facebook, and Twitter: http://www.pinterest.com /architecturemps/; https://www.facebook.com/architecture.mps.9; @ArchitectureMPS

- 2. If not, was it still a useful experience? What other types of jobs do you think it may help you get?
- 3. Did any of the activities you performed with Architecture_MPS help you in your current job? If so, which ones and in which ways?
- 4. If you're still looking for work, do you feel you are more employable as a result? If so, why, and in which ways?
- 5. Please indicate the types of jobs you are interested in obtaining and, if you currently have a job, what your title is.

Thirteen interns responded to the e-mail message, and excerpts from the comments of seven are presented below. These responses were selected because they highlight themes common to all participants. Among the interns cited here are Ashley Kelleher, working toward a dual MSLIS in library and information science and an MS in the history of art at Pratt Institute; Thuy Bui, a qualified accountant in Australia transitioning to a career in information management; Emily Agunod, with a background in architecture and an interest in journalism; Eric An, with a BA in classical studies; and Amber Watson, with a BA in English and a BS in chemistry. All were working toward an MLS degree at the time of the internship and brought different sets of skills and knowledge to the position.

Ashley Kelleher was engaged in sourcing material for the art history component of the host research project "Architecture as Political Image." Her comments have been excerpted here from her end-of-internship report:

As an intern, my primary responsibilities were to conduct remote research in architectural and political history to support the editorial activities of the journal and research group. Over the semester I was assigned three research questions having to do with Oliver Cromwell and the Interregnum in England from 1640 to 1680. Under the supervision of my mentor I became more fluent in working remotely with electronic research subject indexes for architectural history, research guides, and other subject resources that I had not previously used.

I communicated with my supervisor on an average of one to two exchanges every three weeks throughout the semester, similar to the frequency of a thesis supervisor. Rachel gave exceptional feedback on the work I was able to provide for her revision. Her feedback helped me to clarify the findings in my research toward the purposes of easier digestion by another person, to-the-point writing style, and concise delivery—all essential communication tactics for anyone serving academia.

However, at times I also noted a sense of disconnection, believing that if I had known how the research I was doing was contributing to the project, in any way, I would have perhaps experienced a greater sense of purpose as a part of the team.

I would greatly look forward to the expansion and structuring of the Architecture_MPS internship program—as a "startup" of sorts for e-scholarship, the work of the journal/research group is well in-trend within its own (inter)disci-

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plines. However, within the field of art history, the interdisciplinary as well as the digital aspects of the organization's work, remain incredibly progressive. Continuing to work with Architecture_MPS through the expansion of the internship program would be of great curricular benefit to the Art History Department at Pratt Institute, for the potential to balance traditional art historical course offerings with internships in progressive models of interdisciplinary, internationalized scholarly publication.

Ashley Kelleher's comments are broad in scope, and they deal with several aspects that are relevant to any internship of this sort. They highlight the usefulness of art history subject knowledge, and they give a sense of the communication problems that need to be addressed in any remote working relationship. They also underline how the art librarian's research skills have been applied in a way that reflects, but does not directly mirror, that of a typical academic library setting or museum/gallery library.

Some of these issues are also brought up by Eden Parks:

My experience with Architecture_MPS has contributed tremendously to my professional path. Currently, I am employed with Towson University (TU) at its Northeastern Maryland location as library associate. . . . At TU in Northeastern Maryland, the library is virtual. In my position, I am available to help students conduct research using electronic resources.

During the internship with Architecture_MPS, I was able to learn and refine skills that are vital in my post-graduate career. The knowledge I gained about globalization, accessing information, and collaborating to build resources is a key part of my current position. Similar to my experience with AMPS, I now work remotely, with supervision that is not immediately present. During my internship I sharpened my time management skills, ability to innovate, and my independent thinking. My time with AMPS prepared me to work comfortably in this environment.

Eden Parks's comments highlight the virtual workplace experience and the everyday work skills and habits it requires and sharpens, such as time management and self-motivation. This is a recurrent theme from the interns. The next comments from Brenna Painter highlight some of the more specific benefits of operating on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter:

While I cannot state unequivocally that my internship with Architecture_MPS (AMPS) specifically led to my employment at a library, I certainly feel that it imparted a great many skills that made me more employable. As far as the duties I performed for Architecture_MPS, of great use were the editing, social media/communications duties, research, and writing. I list these on my resume not so much in terms of former "employment" but under a section about relevant skills and experience. . . . There were several jobs I have applied for that specifically wanted skills or experience in the area of communications and social media—this makes sense as it is a growing area of interest and usefulness. My

experience managing and running the Twitter account and Facebook account for Architecture_MPS allowed me to list communications and social media management as an area of skill if not a strength.

In the market in which I work—Pittsburgh—there is an overabundance of MLS candidates and job seekers. This makes for a competitive environment, and therefore any edge or unique qualities one can have are more than beneficial. Certainly, having interned with an online publication and one that was outside of my initial education experience allows me to stand out among my peers... Not only can I cite experience derived from running social media accounts, but I also have strength in research garnered from my internship. Just the general experience of having deadlines and timelines within which I had to work gives me a better sense of time management and multi-tasking which I have found suit me well in my current job in the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

The specific benefits highlighted here from experience in applying research, analysis, and communication skills through social media platforms are repeated by Amber Watson:

As an information science specialist, I provide support services to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) with the Office of Science and Technical Information (OSTI) in the areas of acquisition, processing, management, and dissemination of scientific and technical information. . . . Not only was my time with Architecture_MPS a dynamic talking point in the interview, but I was also able to speak to specific experiences with the OSTI social media team. My knowledge of various social media management platforms and other related works gave me pointed knowledge that helps me assist my co-workers in a meaningful way.

Furthermore, my work gathering, preparing, and disseminating content help me accomplish the duties required as an information science specialist. Working with government research documents and preparing them for dissemination is easier because of the time I spent reading and synthesizing scholarly content for simpler ingest.

Amber also highlights how research tasks helped her develop the skills of "synthesizing materials" for quick consumption by a readership in need of information rapidly. This ability to condense information and present it clearly was fundamental to the tasks and training given to Thuy Bui.

I find my experience as an intern with Architecture_MPS extremely useful, especially as I am looking to make a career transition from the finance field to the library and information field. Although I am a fully qualified accountant and still working full time in this field, I am also completing my master's degree in library and information management. Working with Architecture_MPS has given me an insight into the kinds of work information professionals do beyond

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the perceived traditional librarianship roles. One of the projects at Architecture_MPS I assisted with was to look into potential partners for the journal's various activities. It required focused communication and summaries of the data sourced and this complemented very well the subject I was studying at the time: research methods.

Although I am still uncertain about exactly what work I would like to do as an information professional, being involved has given me ideas and food for thought on what I can do and the resources I could make use of to explore this new career path and help me make a decision.

In these comments, Thuy indicates a benefit of any internship —the glimpse it offers of the workplace into which the student may enter. In her case, this benefit has not yet led directly to a job or the application of her developed skills in the work context. In the case of Emily Agunod, however, it has:

One of the biggest challenges of the internship was managing my time and working off-site, but I enjoyed proofing articles written by authors from all over the world and seeing different cultural perspectives. During my virtual internship, I learned to write Chicago-style citations, and it was one of the skills that actually helped me get a job as a part-time bibliographic editor for Dr. Sandra Hirsh, my school director at San Jose State University (SJSU) iSchool. She is the editor of a new textbook, *Information Services Today: An Introduction*, and I worked on the project, checking the accuracy of references and editing copy. It was released by Rowman and Littlefield in March 2015.

Every job is a learning experience, and my internship at Architecture_MPS honed my research and editing skills. It has helped direct my career pathway now and for the future. . . . Since librarianship in the twenty-first century is evolving, my experience at Architecture_MPS has reinforced my abilities to work in a digital environment. . . . Currently, I am taking a data science specialization course at Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. Libraries are becoming the custodians of data, and I'm interested in research data management. I would eventually like to take advantage of our networked world as a researcher, and I would also like to work in distance education.

Emily focuses on two important aspects of this particular internship: its virtual nature and the editing tasks she performed. Although the first aspect is increasingly a part of newer library services, the latter potentially opens a door to new fields, but ones that require the detailed attention and understanding of scholarly convention developed in MLS programs. In contrast, Eric An identifies some of the more generic benefits of internship programs for students, albeit ones that are highlighted by the virtual nature of Architecture_MPS:

While I still haven't found a job in my field, it was still a very useful experience. It helped me to gain confidence and self-esteem, and also to develop my skills and efficiency . . . the experience broadened the scope of my job search. Now I

can confidently state that I have good experience and skills in online research, and I am also qualified for copyediting and other journal-related tasks.

I would say the experience helped me to become more employable in research and journalism areas due to the nature of the tasks I've done. Working with Architecture_MPS assured me that my skills and education could be utilized in nontraditional library jobs. I am willing to try different tasks for Architecture_MPS to develop other skills. The long-distance nature of the communication made me comfortable with written communication and boosted my self-discipline since I had to set up my own schedule. This helped me to discover that I was a highly independent worker.

SUMMARY

The comments collected here represent a sample of the work and experiences (both during and after the internship) of the participating students. They provide a sense of the diverse subject and career backgrounds from which MLS students can come and the range of standard work-based practices, habits, and experiences any internship offers. The comments also reveal some of the specific benefits and difficulties of a program that runs remotely and requires participants to adapt to working practices, subject discipline areas, and tasks to which they are not accustomed, and for which they have not been directly trained. Interestingly, however, they also highlight the adaptability and applicability of library and information science skills outside the standard library context.

The comments are an indicative sample of opinions and tasks related to this program. One aspect of the internship not covered here, however, is the sourcing of images for a digital archive. This aspect of the project involved the interns, under guidance, in sourcing and analyzing both historical and contemporary art images, creating metadata for those images, and bringing them together in cloud-hosted storage. Also not included are comments from interns who worked with the journal's staff to develop the technical means for the journal's website to host this material, including creating a user-friendly interface for ease of discovery. The related copyright issues were taken into consideration and are currently being addressed prior to offering the materials publicly.

In each of these cases, the internship represents an example of how librarians can apply both their specific subject knowledge and their more general library and information science skills in a non-library setting—whether they come from a related art and design discipline or not. Although some of the interns surveyed did have prior experience within the subject area, most did not. Finally, these comments indicate that many of these graduates will, and wish to, go into quite diverse areas. For instance, some participants who have an art background became interested in interdisciplinary scholarship initiatives, while others from a business background became more interested in art and design.

In each case, as indicated by the current literature on transferable skills in the sector, this subject transferability will likely involve the use and knowledge of new information and communication technologies and electronic resources of all kinds. Gaining experience in how this may operate in practice and how the skills and knowl-

edge of librarians can be applied through these virtual and remote contexts is repeatedly highlighted by the participants as a fundamental benefit of this particular program. To what extent these types of transferable skills, unconventional librarian settings, and remote working practices will finally come to characterize the future employment of MLS graduates more generally has yet to be determined. The literature does reveal, however, that the door is open to this type of application of library and information science skills and art history subject knowledge in contexts one might define as nontraditional.

Given the increasing number of new librarians who are finding employment in nontraditional settings, MLS programs might place greater emphasis on encouraging students to pursue internships in these alternative contexts. However, the author argues that there is a role for training programs such as Architecture_MPS in preparing MLS students for the workplaces of the future. Because such programs often lie at the periphery of the library profession, and because they are directly work-related and are therefore obliged to respond quickly to the requirements of the market, they may also provide some insights into the training of librarians who, if the literature proves to be accurate, will be working in academic and public libraries with ever declining frequency.

ARCHITECTURE_MPS INTERNS (FORMER AND CURRENT)

Emily Agunod is completing her MLS at San Jose State University (SJSU). She is a part-time bibliographic editor for Dr. Sandra Hirsh, director at SJSU.

Eric An, MLS, works as a sales associate for an independent bookstore. He also is a volunteer executive at a local library organization in Alberta, Canada.

Thuy Bui, MLS, is a qualified accountant in Australia. She has a career background in the financial sector and is transitioning to a career in information management. She currently works as a senior finance analyst in a research university in Sydney.

Ashley Kelleher is completing her MSLIS/MS in library and information science and history of art at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York.

Brenna Painter, MLS, is employed in the non-profit sector at the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra as subscriber and ticketing services representative.

Eden Parks, MLS, is currently employed with Towson University at its Northeastern Maryland location as library associate.

Amber Watson, MLS, is currently an information science specialist providing support services to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) with the Office of Science and Technical Information (OSTI).

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