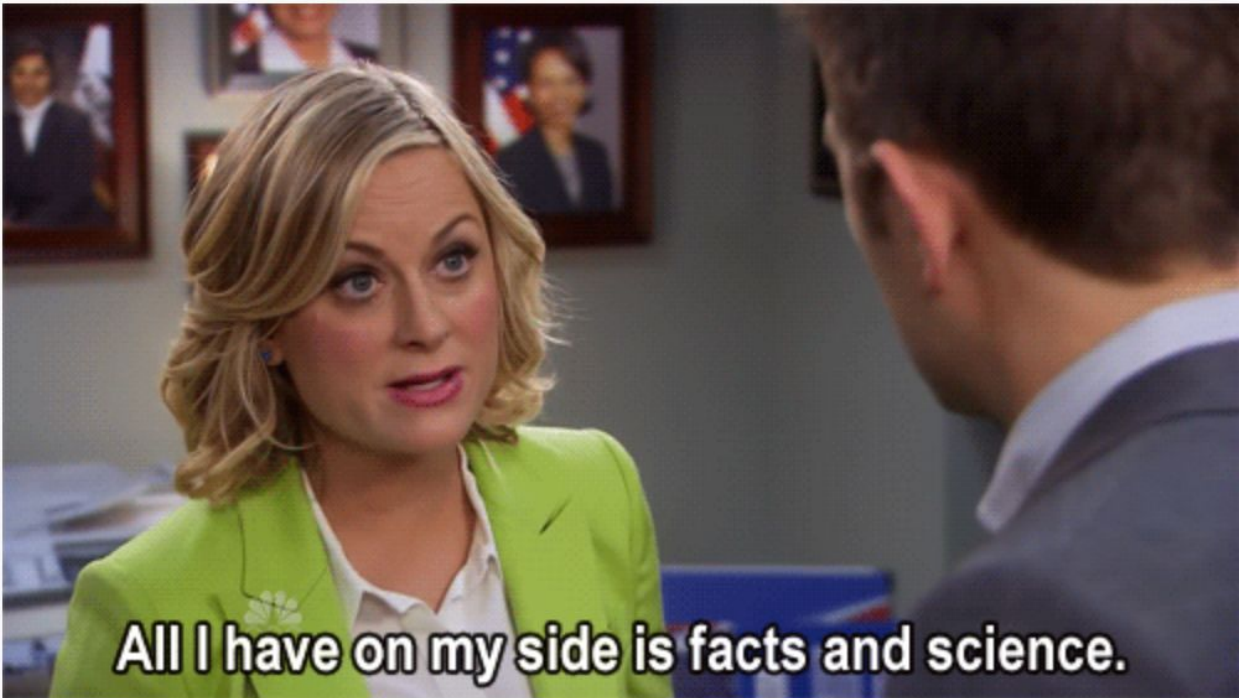


Project and Report Guideline Revision Suggestion: Comments Submitted for Your Consideration



Introduction

Oh hello there, we were just thinking about our projects and reports and we have some thoughts we'd like to share. This report is meant to be a friendly composition of suggestions that we believe would help us better execute meaningful, seamless projects and produce engaging, thoughtful reports.

This report describes some **existing logistical problems** with the project and report format, a case for **expanding the requirement** to include projects that are not conducted in formal internship settings, an argument in favor of **the "report,"** and a contextualizing exploration of some benefits of this assignment through the idea of **publicly engaged scholarship** and the *public* humanities.

Logistical Obstacles

The current project and report format requires an outside “site supervisor” to oversee a student’s internship and “project” progress. This outside site supervisor is also a required report committee member. This format creates a logistical dilemma. First, what if the site supervisor does not live near Blacksburg? Will they be able to sign off on the final report without attending the defense? They why not simply change the requirement so that students receive “site-supervisor endorsement of final report” or some other kind of approval? Second, as an industry professional, what is the site supervisor expected to contribute to an academic defense of an analytical, reflective, (presumably) rigorous and theoretical “report”? Do they not fulfil their duty to the student by mentoring them through the internship process? Third, the site supervisor is not tenured faculty, creating a logistical bind for selecting the second and third committee members, who must then both be tenured/tenure track *[is tenure track even OK?]* faculty.

One possible solution to this logistical problem is to change the committee requirement so that it does not include the site supervisor. Instead, the site supervisor might be required to simply approve a student’s final report (to be sure it’s factual) before that student can defend. If a student wanted to include his/her site supervisor as a committee member, they would be free to do so, but requiring it creates a logistical bind for students who wish to engage in different kinds of projects (outlined below) or who want more flexibility choosing appropriate academic committee members.

Self-Designed Projects and Informal Internships

This “site supervisor”+committee member format seems designed for industry-based internship situations with a traditional boss who might designate a specific “project” for the intern to complete and then serve on that student’s committee in return.

This format does not seem to easily accommodate self-designed projects or informal internship situations wherein a student works with an organization to conduct their own project, but not as a formal “intern.” For example, students might wish to reach out to a population, determine how they might help that population, and use their training to plan and execute an independent project.

Completely self-designed projects or projects conducted in loose affiliation with another community organization have benefits over formal internship situations. They are:

- 1) More marketable to employers since they show independent work ethic, planning, and execution skills
- 2) More personally rewarding since students would be able to choose a project they are truly passionate about, rather than submitting to the oversight/vision of a site supervisor
- 3) Better for society as a whole since they allow students the flexibility to work with communities who might be underserved
- 4) More in line with typical expectations for graduate-level capstone projects

Instead of working for free for a formal institution, students could work for free to benefit communities, projects, problems, and ideas that they define and control under the final oversight of academic faculty.

What's Wrong With Traditional Internships?

In addition to the theoretical benefits of allowing for informal “internship” experiences that are not defined and overseen by an industry-based “site-supervisor,” I think there are also technical drawbacks to formal internship situations.

One purpose of internships is getting students into institutions to work on projects is so that they can establish connections and network in a field that is notoriously difficult to enter professionally. However, the field is so difficult to enter, arguably, that networking efforts are only a drop on a scale heavily so weighted against us it might not be overwhelmingly useful. In addition, networking can be done in different ways. What about networking with communities or local governments who might be interested in receiving project-based assistance from an enthusiastic graduate student?

Another purpose of internships is that they provide valuable work experience to cite on resumes. This is true, but more true for undergraduate students who have not invested significant time, energy, and money into pursuing advanced degrees, and who might not have *any* work experience to cite otherwise. It's difficult for me to imagine a situation in which a qualified graduate student has *no* work experience and therefore needs an internship for this reason alone.

In addition, most internships (and the concept of internships) are designed for undergraduate students and are unpaid. It is demoralizing and inappropriate to ask graduate students to compete against undergraduates for internship positions, and it is immoral to expect them to work for free. Paid arts internships are difficult to come by, and it is unreasonable to expect that all students will be able to find one suitable for the project and report requirement. Allowing students to pursue informal, self-directed projects (and perhaps even revisiting the 180 hour requirement) would give them flexibility to work for pay, live where they'd like (and can afford), and pursue other interests, while still executing a relevant project and fulfilling the degree requirement.

The Report is Valuable

The report aspect of our project is valuable--it should not be an afterthought or a technicality designed to enable retroactive internship credit. It would be better to help students plan projects that they are personally interested/invested in, require them to conduct a review of relevant literature for publicly engaged scholarship, and write reflective reports in a structured setting. It's better to ask students to produce a project and report that they have chosen and care about than to ask students to find an internship position, work on a project heavily guided/defined by a site supervisor, and produce a retroactive report of activities that they may or may not be truly invested in.

In addition, the final report might serve as a valuable case study of a student's experiences and project, and could be a piece suitable for journal or conference submission in a more practical, case-study-based publication (e.g. [Public](#), [JCES](#), [NetRoots](#), more at the [Americans for the Arts website](#)). This kind of comprehensive project + publishable reflection would look good on resumes and would have lasting career impact (which is not always true of internships).

How Might the Report Credits be Structured?

Instead of asking students to complete 6 credits of report-writing after their internship, students might be asked to take 1, 2, or even 3 credits of report preparation during the spring of their first year. These credits might be used to help students develop their own projects OR secure valuable internships. They might also be used to help students identify

theoretical components that will compose their final report, to develop a literature review, and to plan for future writing. Students could use the final credits to reflect on experiences, define the success of the project/internship, and write a compelling case study of their experiences.

Regardless of how the credits are structured, I think some report prep credits--taken as a regular class--would be valuable for us to exchange ideas and develop our projects.

Publicly Engaged Scholarship (According to Devon)

I think publicly engaged scholarship is (partially) the future of the academy. In the same way that “public history” has grown over the last decade to be a prominent, practically engaged wing of an otherwise siloed discipline, I believe “public humanities” and “public arts” are growing fields to which the formal humanities and arts should aspire.

Arts and humanities-specific examples of publicly engaged scholarship might be things like creative placemaking or community cultural development, in which community development is undertaken via arts programming. Community revitalization programs that focus on creating arts or recreation spaces, after-school arts programs, or even community theater/art projects that engage pertinent community issues are examples of these concepts in practice.

Unfortunately, these kinds of programs are still sparse; they are outnumbered by traditional museums, historic houses, and formal art galleries. Therefore, innovative community engaged scholarship presents an opportunity for us graduate students to contribute something meaningful to a field that could benefit from our contributions--that we could help shape and guide.

Publicly engaged scholarship could be our generation’s contribution to the academy, and the MCPH project and report requirement could be an avenue to assist and encourage students to develop innovative new projects and ideas or to engage with different communities and make an impact. These kind of projects would benefit from project and report requirements that do not require a site supervisor as a “report” committee person and that do not require constant, formal supervision by said supervisor.

Literature

Blandy, Doug, and John Fenn. "Sustainability: Sustaining Cities and Community Cultural Development." *Studies In Art Education* 53, no. 4 (Summer2012 2012): 270-282.

An essay that explores the link between art education and sustainability. The authors argue that art educators should use the idea of "sustainability" as a cross-disciplinary method of responding to the environmental crisis.

Goldbard, Arlene, and Don Adams. *New Creative Community: The art of cultural development*. Oakland, CA: New Village Press, 2006.

This influential book is important reference material for anyone interested in Community Cultural Development.

Keefe, Susan E. *Participatory Development in Appalachia: Cultural Identity, Community, and Sustainability*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009.

In this book, Susan Keefe argues in favor of a more inclusive approach to regional development in Appalachia that seeks to involve communities through public participation and civic engagement. Keefe believes that local culture, communities, and individuals are individual and can be catalyzed to create change in their communities.

Markuse, Ann, and Gadwa, Anne. "Creative Placemaking: Executive Summary." Washington D.C.: *National Endowment for the Arts*, 2010.

<<https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/CreativePlacemaking-Paper.pdf>>

A white paper exploring the idea of "creative placemaking" with a series of relevant case studies at the end. This document is a good justification for the relevance of our work and its timeliness in conjunction with other prominent projects.

Paul J. Kuttner. "Cultural Organizing" 2015. <http://culturalorganizing.org/>

Post et al. Ed. *Publicly Engaged Scholars: Next Generation Engagement and the Future of Higher Education*. California: Stylus Publishing, 2016.

Zakaras, Laura Julia F. Lowell. Cultivating Demand for the Arts Arts Learning, Arts Engagement, and State Arts Policy." Santa Monica: Rand Research in the Arts.
<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/audience-development-for-the-arts/key-research/Documents/Arts-Learning-and-Arts-Engagement.pdf>

Relevant Organizations

Americans for the Arts - <http://www.americansforthearts.org/>

Imagining America - <http://imaginingamerica.org/>

US Department of Arts and Culture - <http://usdac.us/>

Arts and Democracy - <http://artsanddemocracy.org/index.php>

Appalshop - <https://www.appalshop.org/>

Highlander Center - <http://highlandercenter.org/>

The Culture Group - <https://theculturegroup.org/>

The Listening Project -
http://www.listeningproject.info/resources/dayhoit_listening_project.php

Local Foundations (Community Foundation of the NRV - <https://www.cfnrv.org/>)

Local Arts Councils (Blacksburg Regional Art Association - <http://www.blacksburgart.org/>)

Education reform organizations (Teacher Powered Schools -
<http://www.teacherpowered.org/>)

Prison reform organizations (Together We Bake - <http://www.togetherwebake.org/>)

Environmental justice/reform organizations (WV Highlands Conservancy
<http://www.wvhighlands.org/>)

Recommendations

Our primary recommendation is to both 1) expand the project and report requirement to accommodate self-designed projects conducted via informal internship, partnerships, or mentorships with community organizations and 2) create a detailed set of guidelines for executing the project, report, and report credits.

Specific Guidelines

Right now, the project and report agreement form is inadequate. It is focused mostly on establishing a report committee and does not provide guidelines for proposing, executing, and documenting our projects. The guidelines might be improved by allowing students to choose either a traditional internship with a project defined and overseen by the site supervisor OR an informal apprenticeship/partnership with a community organization in order to execute their own project, “supervised” by academic faculty. Some friendly suggestions/ideas for you to consider might be:

- 1) Requiring a thorough proposal--perhaps something even along the lines of a grant proposal (for writing experience) (internship students could submit this a few weeks into their internships, but informal partnership project students could submit this to a faculty advisor before beginning their projects as part of an approval process, and would then have the documentation necessary if they wanted to apply for actual grants)
- 2) Revisiting the hours requirement so that the 180 hours might be spent working on the internship site OR working independently on executing the project
- 3) Requiring a logbook of hours with specific criteria (e.g. date, hours, what did you do?)
- 4) Allowing students to create committees that do not include a site supervisor (for reasons described in the “logistical obstacles” section)
- 5) Creating a format/guidelines for the final paper (e.g. should be at least 30 pages, must have a literature review, must have a description of the project, must have a critical evaluation of the success of the project)

Appendix

Explanatory diagram:

