Delivering a structured pre-course intern programme at University College Dublin Library

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Introduction

Four miles south of Dublin's city centre, University College Dublin (UCD) is the Republic of Ireland's largest university. Its library dates from the establishment UCD as a constituent college of the National University of Ireland in 1908. It operates from five sites, the James Joyce Library being the largest and housing the administrative units and 80% of stock and study space. The library supports the learning, teaching and research needs of some 30,000 students and staff (plus over 5,000 students based in affiliated and otherwise related UCD programmes abroad) in a wide range of disciplines. In 2015 UCD Archives and the National Folklore Collection were amalgamated with UCD Library which, together with the library's Special Collections, constitutes a strong cultural heritage offering.

LIS education in Ireland (UCD Library commitment to the information profession)

UCD Library and library and information service education and training in Ireland are inextricably linked. The Diploma in Library Training, established in UCD in 1928, was hosted by the University Library, with the syllabus delivered by the University Librarian, senior colleagues, academic faculty and guest lecturers (Traxler Brown, 2009). Thanks largely to continuity of personnel – a graduate of the inaugural class succeeded the founding Director of the School of Librarianship in the dual role of University Librarian and Director of the School – this situation prevailed until the mid-1970s. Then the incoming University Librarian devolved his inherited role as Diploma Programme Director to the holder of a new academic chair in the Faculty of Arts (ibid.). Following academic appointments to the new Department of Library and Information Studies, and the development of a restructured diploma curriculum, academic (MA, MLitt, PhD) and professional (MLIS) degree programmes were developed (ibid.). These programmes are now delivered in the recently restructured and renamed School of Information and Communication Studies in the College of Human Sciences. (http://www.ucd.ie/ics.ie). UCD's monopoly of library education in Ireland ended in 2009, when the Dublin Business School (DBS) – a private, for-profit institution specialising in the provision of career-focused postgraduate programmes – launched an MSc in Information and Library Management on both a full- and a part-time basis in its Postgraduate School of Business and Law.

The need for pre-course work experience

Work experience in a library or information environment has long been a pre-requisite for admission to the MLIS course in UCD, with the length of experience required varying over the years. The current requirement is six weeks. The library intern programme outlined in this article is structured to meet that specific need. It also meets the needs of the DBS programme, which incorporates, during the programme in this case, a three-week (or equivalent) work placement in a library and / or information management setting. Students with prior experience are exempt unless they choose to engage for additional experience.

Structured programme

In addition to requests to visit the library, including those from international visitors via exchange schemes, the library receives a number of requests annually from people seeking library experience. The workload and resultant lost staff outputs as a result of such visits has meant that we have had to become more selective in agreeing to such requests. However, the management team remains fully committed to continuing support for the library and information profession, and feels that rather than operating on an individual and ad hoc basis, a structured programme would be mutually beneficial, thereby contributing to the fulfilment of course requirements for workplace experience for MLIS candidates, and also to the delivery of specific library project outcomes.

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UCD Library therefore offered a fully structured interns project from 5 July to 13 August 2009 for six interns. This offer was repeated in 2012, when it focused on a project to identify and remove pre-1930s titles from general stock.

Extensive paperwork, outlines of work achieved and feedback reports were maintained, particularly for the 2009 programme; these were valuable in shaping the current programme.

Review and refresh of the programme

In 2015 the question of running a programme regularly was discussed, and the Head of Outreach and the User Services Manager volunteered to lead the programme. A great deal of project work was planned for the summer of 2015, so there was a benefit to the library in running the programme and as well as a guaranteed range of project work of a suitable level for interns.

After revieweing the excellent previous schemes, we kept the key features, including basing practical work around one project, allocating each intern to a home library team, and providing a fully structured programme combining project work with a series of unit overviews and presentations.

Changes were made to cut back on the bureaucracy for library staff, to spread the workload and to provide a richer intern programme. The main changes agreed were:

- eliminate detailed record keeping by library staff, as this is not a requirement of the institutions concerned

- devolve record keeping of work done and reflection to the interns themselves

- maintain a standard structure for the main weeks of the programme

- introduce a mid-week day of visits to units and thematic talks to break up the week

- introduce practical activities: poster and presentation production, reflective diary keeping, an introduction to the CMS and LibGuide environments, an introduction to the library management system and shelving practice

- include some visits to other libraries in the programme

- ensure the interns had regular mentoring from their home team leader and a weekly update chat with the User Services Manager.

Experience in 2015

The programme ran from 6 July to 14 August, with four interns participating, all of whom were enrolled for the UCD MLIS programme. This was fewer than anticipated, but several candidates could not commit to the dates, and we were not prepared to support any other work experience during the summer. The home teams selected for these interns were: Special Collections, Collections, Client Services and Research Services, as they all had suitable projects.

As an intern's work day is from 10:00 until 16:00 (which we feel is fair given that there is no payment), with one day a week spent on other activities, the return in terms of concrete project work outputs from the programme is limited: in effect around 100 hours of work from each intern over the six weeks, including training time. While the level of maturity of the interns varied considerably, in a programme such as this, the input determines the reward for all parties.

The approach to obtaining library staff feedback on the programme was simplified: we offered a couple of sessions for all staff involved in the

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programme to meet and discuss the experience, with an online option also available. Intern feedback was circulated via an online mini-survey, and despite chasers, only two of the four completed the survey. Although this was disappointing, a possible reason is that two of the group had by the end of the intern programme deferred their places on the course. However, overall intern and library staff feedback indicated that the programme worked well: two of the interns in particular seemed to thrive and are now on our casual staff payroll in various capacities. Though this is not something that can be assumed on either side as a programme outcome, it has in real terms proven to be a major return on investment for the library from the 2015 programme. Their testimonials are worth quoting:

> During the time I spent on the internship, I got the opportunity to work within the Research Services section of the library, an area of librarianship in which I have a personal interest. In addition to receiving valuable experience working within this department, the structure of the internship programme also provided the opportunity to learn about all of the library's other sections, and how they work together to maintain the library as a whole. I found the internship highly rewarding. I gained valuable experience and made my first contacts within the library world. I enjoyed my time in the internship and learnt a lot about the industry I was getting involved in. In addition to this the internship also provided me with the opportunity to gain paid employment within the library during the academic term. I would recommend the summer internship without hesitation to anybody who has the opportunity to undertake it. (Alison)

> For me, the internship was a trial run to see how I would like a career in a library. And honestly I could not have enjoyed it more. The six week programme allowed me to see what working in an academic library is really like both in terms of the day-to-day running and long term projects. Each of UCD Library's departments was visited for a day, giving me the chance to see the different work each area does. Chatting to the members of different departments gave me a better understanding of what each role entails. Before the programme I was convinced that I would only ever want to work behind the scenes in collections. However, experience gained on the desk showed me that I enjoy being a part of client services just as much as collections. Being trained at the desk and in other areas when it was quiet over the summer was an added bonus. Come September, I was fully prepared for the possibility of work in the library as a student. Having never attended UCD before, the programme also gave me the chance to become familiar with both the campus and the library, knowledge of which was incredibly useful once lectures began. (Megan)

The programme is labour intensive, but spreading the load across teams worked well, as did developing the role of User Services Manager to maintain co-ordination and deal with any programme alterations and other issues as they occurred. Commitment to the programme is essential to success.

Review of the programme

The main changes implemented for 2016 were:

- A marketing flyer including testimonials and a full outline of the programme was forwarded to both institutions in January 2016.

- Feedback from the interns will be sought on paper on the last day

- A larger group of interns is worth aiming for (in the event we have six for 2016 – but we would like up to ten). We had hoped to provide a social dimension to the experience, but this did not happen last year, and

discussion sessions were not as lively as we would have liked. A larger number should help.

- Where possible the presentations and day spent in each unit will be opened up so that interested library staff can also attend, as it is felt this would help to justify the work and time involved; this may require a shift from round-table discussion approaches to a more formal theatre-style presentation for some sessions.

UCD Library Interns Programme 2016
July 4 - August 12

Can We Help You?

Looking for a 6 week internship, before starting your library/information course?

We offer an excellent programme based at the James Joyce Library, which aims to offer the opportunity to meet many of our staff and to offer a good overview of work in an academic library today.

" I would recommend the summer internship without hesitation to anybody who has the opportunity to undertake it"

Alison, one of our 2015 interns

" ..the internship was a trial run to see how I would like a career in a library....

And honestly I could not have enjoyed it more. The six week programme allowed me to see what working in an academic library is really like both in terms of the day-to-day running and long term projects"

Megan, one of our 2015 interns

What Do We Offer?

A fully structured programme
10-4 working day (unpaid)
Placement within a friendly Library team
A weekly chat on how things are going
Practical work experience on projects
A programme of talks
A day a week visiting each Library team
Visits to other libraries
Maintenance of a reflective diary
Preparation of a poster and short presentation to deliver on your last day
Introduction to desk work and the system used to manage our stock
Introduction to our website and online guide platforms

Apply Now!

Contact Claire.Nolan@ucd.ie in the UCD School of Information and Communication Studies
OR
Apply directly to Avril.Patterson@ucd.ie

Leabharlann UCD
UCD Library

Marketing leaflet for the 2016 programme

Staff feedback from the 2015 programme indicated that it would be much better to offer the programme earlier in the summer when fewer library staff members are away, and before the peak period of preparation for the new academic year, when planned projects are commencing. The 2016 programme was therefore initially marketed for the period 13 June – 22 July.

Take-up was minimal, and very disappointing in the light of targeted marketing efforts. Discussion with the UCD School of Information and Communication Studies suggested that the earlier dates were unattractive to potential students for a number of reasons: they did not yet have their examination results; they generally preferred to have the earlier part of the summer to themselves, with the interns programme running immediately before the course commencement in September. DBS indicated that placements were already organised by mid-

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to late January, which suggests that the 2017 programme should be marketed before Christmas 2016 to attract that cohort.

Based on the poor response, in April we relaunched the programme with revised dates of 4 July – 12 August. Interest picked up immediately, and six have signed up for the programme.

Conclusions

UCD library staff has a great tradition of networking and sharing expertise, and, despite very heavy workloads, all staff involved in delivering the programme put a lot of effort into it regardless of any direct benefits to themselves. This is the first essential to the success of such a programme.

The revised programme worked well, and now that the shape of the scheme has been established and the talks and unit visit presentations prepared, the workload in offering the programme is less onerous. Feedback from both interns and colleagues is vital to keep it fresh and to maintain relevance. We are committed to offering the programme on an annual basis for as long as it is needed to meet the pre-requisites of academic programmes. Levels of interest are a concern, but our experience this year has indicated that marketing at the appropriate time in the academic calendar is essential, and that if we want takers from DBS we shall need to market before Christmas each year.

Other academic libraries in Ireland are also taking on interns and this is an area where co-operation and two-centre programmes could be developed, if the wish to collaborate is there. There would be merit, for example, in an intern spending three weeks in a large university library and the remainder in a smaller library or a public library that has a different mission and user profile.

Reference

Traxler Brown, B. 2009. Towards 100 years of LIS education and research at UCD. *Aslib proceedings*, vol. 61 (3), pp.282–301

Appendix

Interns programme at UCD Library 6 July – 14 August 2015

The six-week programme will run from 6 July to 14 August

The programme will be led by Avril Patterson (User Services Manager) together with Ros Pan (Head of Outreach). Each intern will meet with Avril on a Monday morning to discuss how they are getting on, their portfolio and any other issues that arise.

Each intern will be placed in a unit as their home team, and will have a supervisor in that team who will manage their time here on a day-to-day basis. As well as getting to know the team during their time here, they will do their principal practical work in that team, working on one or more summer projects during weeks 2–5 of the programme.

In addition to that practical work experience, the programme includes:

- Initial orientation and tour round all libraries, plus day later in the programme when each intern can spend a whole day shadowing at a site library of their choosing in week 4

- Practical experience of using the Millennium Library Management System (LMS) and some shadowing on service desks and shelving during week 1; hands-on experience of editing the library website and LibGuides online environments in week 5

- Spending time with one of our units each week, to include a range of presentations and talks on aspects of the teamwork, to give rounded overview of what is done in each team

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- A number of one-hour presentations covering: career paths; planning, strategy and quality; library collaborations and organisations; external talk from student advisors or similar
- A couple of visits to other libraries in the final week
- Each intern will be asked to maintain a detailed reflective journal of what they have learned and done during their time here; their thoughts and reflections; and, if they wish, photos. These will be used to produce, with assistance as required, a poster and a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation. Each intern will give a ten-minute talk in the last session to include this presentation and discussing their poster.