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2023 German Library Schools Study Tour:

Report of Candice Dahl, BID grant recipient

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the University of Saskatchewan for granting and partially funding my sabbatical in 2023. In addition, I am grateful for the study grant received from *BID: Bibliothek and Information International* for my professional visits in Germany. Traveling and networking with librarians outside of Canada provided me with information to address some of the questions I set out to answer. However, just as valuable have been the many things about which I did not anticipate learning: the education of librarians, library practices, and the profession of librarianship in Germany. Rich conversations with people who arranged meetings, translated documents, and made time for me, an unknown librarian from thousands of kilometres away, were enlightening and thought-provoking. My thanks go out to the many librarians, library employees, and faculty members that I met on my tour.

Tour Summary

The goal of my 2023 sabbatical project was to learn more about how practicums/internships in undergraduate library training programs are structured and managed. In Canada we offer library and information studies programs at the *master's* level only. However, at the University of Saskatchewan I teach a class for undergraduate students who are considering librarianship as a career but are not yet in a master's program. The course (INTS 380) includes an academic component as well as practical work experience in my academic library.

In order to investigate undergraduate programs specifically, I traveled outside of Canada. In 2022 I contacted several institutions in Germany and Switzerland, and visits were arranged at those that responded with interest. My tour included stops at Technische Hochschule Köln, UAS Potsdam, IBI Berlin, and HTWK Leipzig in Germany, as well as HEG Geneva in Switzerland. The meetings were held between March 20th and April 25th.

At most sites I met with either the administrative and/or faculty coordinator of student internships, as well as librarians who had supervised student interns. In some cases, meetings also included directors of library school programs, research assistants, and internationalization officers. In addition, at UAS Potsdam my visit included a Q&A session in front of a student audience.

In meetings my primary questions were: are outcomes (or other documentation) from the library school shared with internship supervisors; how is it ensured that the internship projects meet the requirements of the BA program; how is student work assessed; what kinds of projects do students in academic libraries work on - and do they differ from the projects that Masters-level interns complete; and what challenges arise for students, supervisors, and faculty coordinators?

Documents provided to me in translation included a combination of internship objectives, guidelines, regulations, and sample contracts or agreements from each school.

Observations

Examining internship practices

The people who responded to my request for information and an in-person visit were generally interested in examining their own institution's internship practices, and some were actively planning reviews or revisions. In this context I think our conversations were valuable for both parties. I provided an external perspective on their practices, as well as information on my own practices. They did the same for me. It was particularly useful for me to see the kinds of guidelines they provide to librarians supervising interns, as I will likely need to create similar documentation if I successfully recruit librarian supervisors from institutions other than my own.

Purpose of internships

There is a significant difference in purpose between the academic internship that I offer for undergraduate students not yet in a library program, and those offered at the institutions I visited. While I seek to introduce students to academic librarianship broadly, I learned that in library science BA programs in Germany students already have valuable knowledge and experience in libraries, and internships are intended to orient them to a more specific, preferred field within the profession. While I don't think it is appropriate to revise my purpose, I can certainly see the advantage of having this kind of specificity.

The role of tacit knowledge

When I questioned supervising librarians about what they needed from library schools to ensure the internships they supervised met objectives and requirements, most referred to their tacit knowledge. Past experiences as either an intern or as a supervisor provided them with a clear sense of procedures and requirements, and most internships go smoothly. This was especially interesting to me, as any external librarian supervisors that I recruit will not have tacit knowledge related to the specific internship encompassed by the course I teach. It also alerted me to the possibility that external librarian supervisors may hold tacit knowledge from *other* types of internships, and that I should be mindful of establishing clarity regarding the INTS 380 internship.

Feedback loops

A further point that came up at several institutions was that there may be room for more formalized feedback between internship supervisors and library schools, based in part on student experiences. Overall, internships go well but supervisors in libraries may not always get comprehensive assessments to help them improve student experiences, and library schools/faculty internship advisors don't always communicate with them directly.

BA vs. MA degrees

Conversations about differences between BA and MA internship projects helped me understand how internships for these two degrees differ. My questions led to further discussions about the differences between the two degrees overall, why a student chooses one or the other, and the extent to which

professional positions and roles differed depending on the degree received. I heard a broad range of opinions on this topic, with some faculty and librarians noting that the distinctions are not always clear in practice. It made me wonder if librarians and educators in Germany may benefit from further conversations at a national level.

Next Steps

The international perspective that I gained through my meetings at German library schools is helping me shape the next steps for my internship course at the University of Saskatchewan. In particular, it reminds me that there are multiple ways to achieve specific goals, and that listening and learning is a solid basis for generating new ideas. My specific goals are to recruit librarians from other universities to supervise my internship students in 2024. An important component of this will be to revise or create documentation with the examples and considerations from German library schools in mind. Second, I will refine ways to collect feedback from all involved parties, and to share it between students, internship supervisors, and me – the course instructor. In addition, Dr. Ulrike Wuttke (UAS Potsdam) and I hope to facilitate an collaborative online international learning experience ([COIL](#)) between our students in 2024.

I am thankful for this opportunity to travel and study. What I have learned is sure to enrich my professional practice and the experiences that internships provide for my students. I look forward to refining my practices and trying new things in 2024.