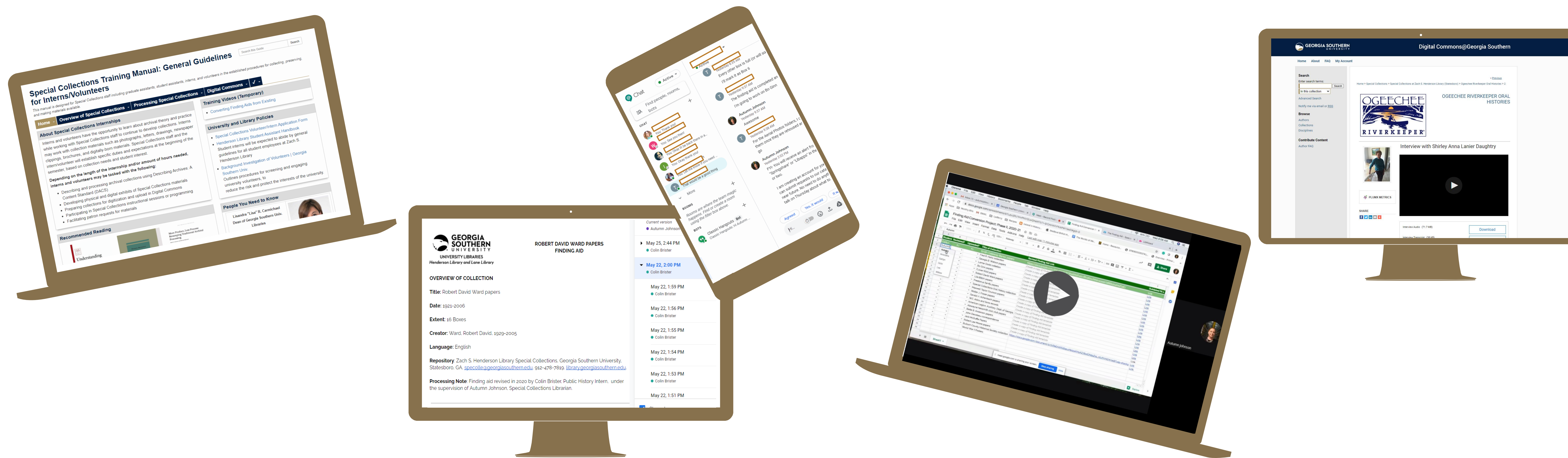


INTERN-IN-PLACE: DEVELOPING VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS AS A RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Autumn M. Johnson
Special Collections Librarian
Georgia Southern University

autumnjohnson@georgiasouthern.edu
she, her, hers



Special Collections internships offer experiential learning opportunities for students wishing to gain knowledge of archival theory and methodology. These internships expose students directly to hands-on work with archival collections in a library setting as part of their program curriculum. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related closures, resulted in a number of on-site internship cancellations and postponements for students. However, the prompt development of virtual opportunities could uniquely benefit both the student and the library.



BACKGROUND

Special Collections at Zach S. Henderson Library has actively partnered with academic units to offer credited undergraduate and graduate internship opportunities. The number of interns has grown considerably in recent years with most enrolled in the Introduction to Public History course for class credit and those pursuing a non-thesis project in history as their overall graduate program requirements in the MA in Public History program. These hands-on internship experiences provide students vital opportunities to gain professional archival experience in a wide-range of areas from public service to processing to digitization.

The escalation of COVID-19 and the shift to remote work unexpectedly changed the trajectory of planned internships for the Summer 2020 and Fall 2020 as University buildings closed and services were greatly scaled back. Special Collections staff needed to quickly adapt in order to take advantage of this important manpower and to ensure students would be allowed to pursue these credited opportunities.



TEMPORARY SOLUTIONS

In addition to the typical requirements of GS Libraries, the Academic program, and Human Resources for internships, both the supervising staff and individual interns needed to address critical changes imposed by the remote environment.

Three critical areas needed to be addressed: Shifting University and program policy, developing a system of communication that could ensure long-term accountability and track daily work, and identification and implementation of project-based tasks that could be completed remotely within the semester.

The University's integration of the Google Suite made tracking day-to-day processes possible. Student schedules were established using a GCalendar and the Google Hangout and Chat features allowed for interns to "meet" daily with site supervisor. Most tasks were completed in Google Docs and Sheets which allowed site-supervisor to track intern work in a less invasive way. Other tasks utilized library web-based platforms such as Springshare's LibGuides and LibAnswers as well the University's Institutional Repository.



PERMANENT FIXTURES

The continued availability of internships throughout the early COVID-19 pandemic period allowed Special Collections to maintain its commitment to student interns completing degrees and their faculty supervisors.

The availability of valuable intern manpower also greatly benefited Special Collections by allowing the department to address the backlog of digital collections and needed improvements to departmental organization, policy, and public-facing websites.

While the move to the remote environment required the on-site supervisor to develop tools previously not available, these training tools ultimately proved valuable to the long-term training staff. Through Fall 2020 the materials created were used to train newly hired Graduate Assistants, Student Assistants, Interns, and Volunteers. This shift also allowed staff to maintain their flexibility during the prolonged COVID period.

Into Spring 2021, perhaps beyond, remote work will continue to be an option for students who may need to self-isolate or *intern-in-place* due to health or personal reasons.

