

Magazine Association of BC – Internship Subsidy Program

Past Interns Survey, Aug-Oct 2019 – Research Report

Limitations of the survey results and conclusions

We identified thirty-five people who had interned at member magazines through our internship subsidy program between 2012 and 2018, and sent messages to the email addresses they provided at the time of their internships.

For those people that we had old addresses for, we contacted their former internship hosts for more current addresses or asked them to pass on our email messages, and also looked for ways to contact former interns online through their websites and Twitter accounts.

Fourteen of the thirty-five former interns, or 40%, filled out the survey. Only two of these respondents could be identified as coming from underrepresented or equity-seeking groups, but as only six former interns of the thirty-five could be said to be from these groups, or 17%, it was reasonably representative of the group. (Note by contrast that half of the twenty-two interns hired under the subsidy program between 2018 and 2020 could be identified as coming from underrepresented or equity-seeking groups, which, if this encouraging trend continues, could really change the local publishing culture.)

This survey was also sent well before the pandemic started making the news and changing our industry in drastic ways, so that also needs to be taken into account when reviewing responses.

Because only 40% responded, half of them from literary magazines, the survey results, analyses, and conclusions cannot be said to represent with certainty the typical experience of interns funded through our internship subsidy program, of new professionals, or of magazine publishing as a whole today.

However, some data trends and comments can be used to identify areas that the association needs to follow up on or improve in terms of support, or that policymakers need to investigate further as possibly concerning.

Findings

Question 1: Contact information.

Twelve respondents were still located in BC, with only two elsewhere, and none in Toronto. Among the respondents in BC, only one had moved outside the area they were originally located in.

This came as a surprise, as we felt that at least a few of the interns would move to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) to take advantage of the much larger magazine publishing sector there.

We can only speculate that there were barriers or disincentives to moving, e.g. they could only find entry-level positions at GTA firms which meant they couldn't afford to move, or the jobs were offered to locals who already had contacts at the magazines. If this is true, this is especially ironic considering that SFU Publishing in Vancouver offers the only master's level degree in book and magazine publishing in Canada.

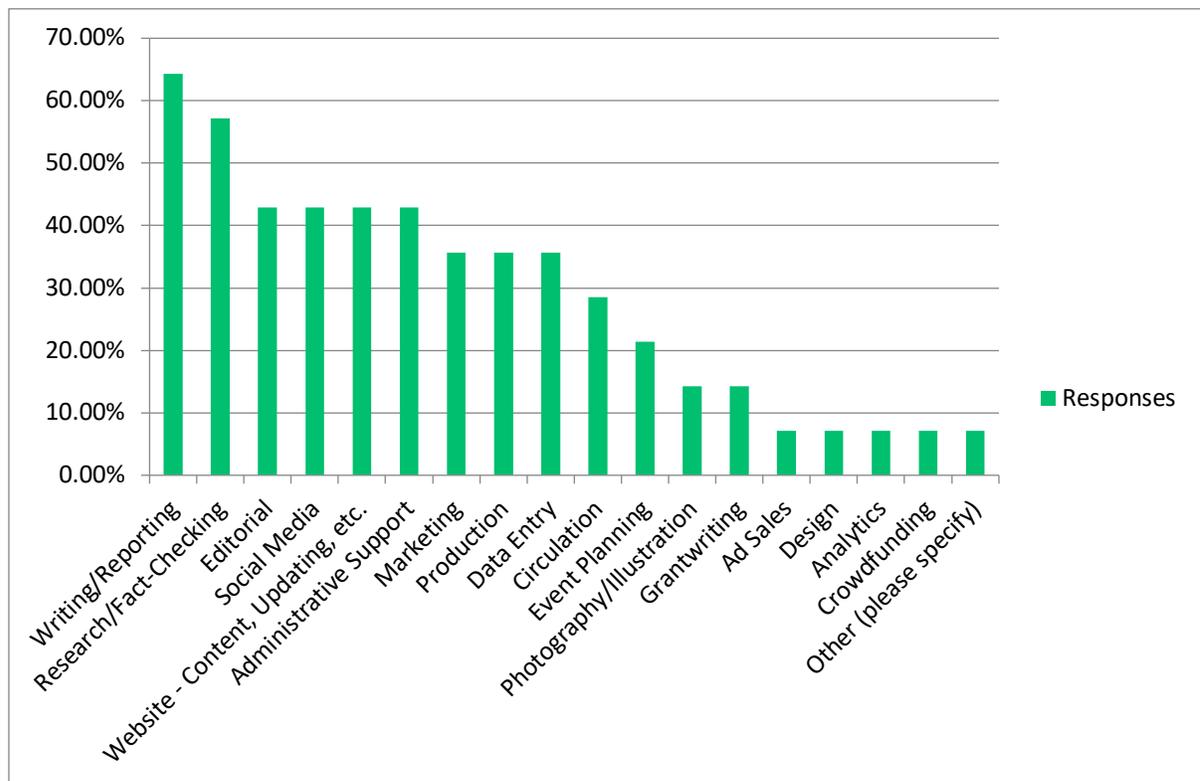
This may also mean that we need to encourage the many national magazines based in Ontario to do more to incentivize, recruit and bring in staff from other provinces and territories to encourage content and style reflective of Canada as a whole, not just Ontario. The current landscape of much more work moving online may help there.

Question 2: Which magazine(s) or organization did you intern at?

Magazine	Interns
Geist	5
National Observer	2
BAZOO!	1
British Columbia History	1
Page One Publishing (Douglas, YAM magazines)	1
Poetry Is Dead	1
ROOM/EVENT magazines (shared internship)	1
St. Joseph Communications (WHERE Vancouver)	1

Having five out of six former *Geist* interns fill out the survey, and half of the total respondents having interned at a literary magazine, is unexpected. There is a danger that their responses may skew the data toward the experiences of interns who are interested in literary magazine publishing, which, although important, is a small (and underpaid) part of the industry.

Question 3: What were your main duties? (Check all that apply.)



As illustrated above, in addition to writing/reporting and research/fact-checking, at least 40% did editorial work, social media, website content/updating, and administrative support as part of their internships.

We wondered if being assigned certain duties predicted whether the intern stayed in the industry, but there didn't seem to be a correlation, at least within this limited data set.

We are a little concerned by how many interns did administrative support (43%) and data entry (36%), as this would have consisted mainly of rote tasks that did not make use of their education or provide quality work experiences or skill development.

We know of at least two magazines that assigned data entry, envelope stuffing and other basic work to interns as a large part of their work. One of the reasons we do site visits is to

emphasise that the intern must be assigned meaningful work and to commit the supervisor to offering more interesting and challenging tasks for the remainder of the internship if it looks like they haven't been, but supervisors don't always come through.

To combat this further, we will offer a check-in each week to all interns working at magazines so they can report about what they did the previous week. Any exploitation of an intern as cheap labour can then hopefully be identified and dealt with quickly, and, in extreme cases, the intern can be re-assigned to another magazine for the remainder of their internship to give them another opportunity to learn and grow.

Question 4: When did you intern?

Respondents represented a good sampling of interns from a number of subsidy intake periods:

Year(s)	No.
2012	1
2014 and/or 2014-2015	3
2015 and/or 2015-2016	1
2016 and/or 2016-2017	5
2017 and/or 2017-2018	4

Question 5: Where and for whom are you working now?

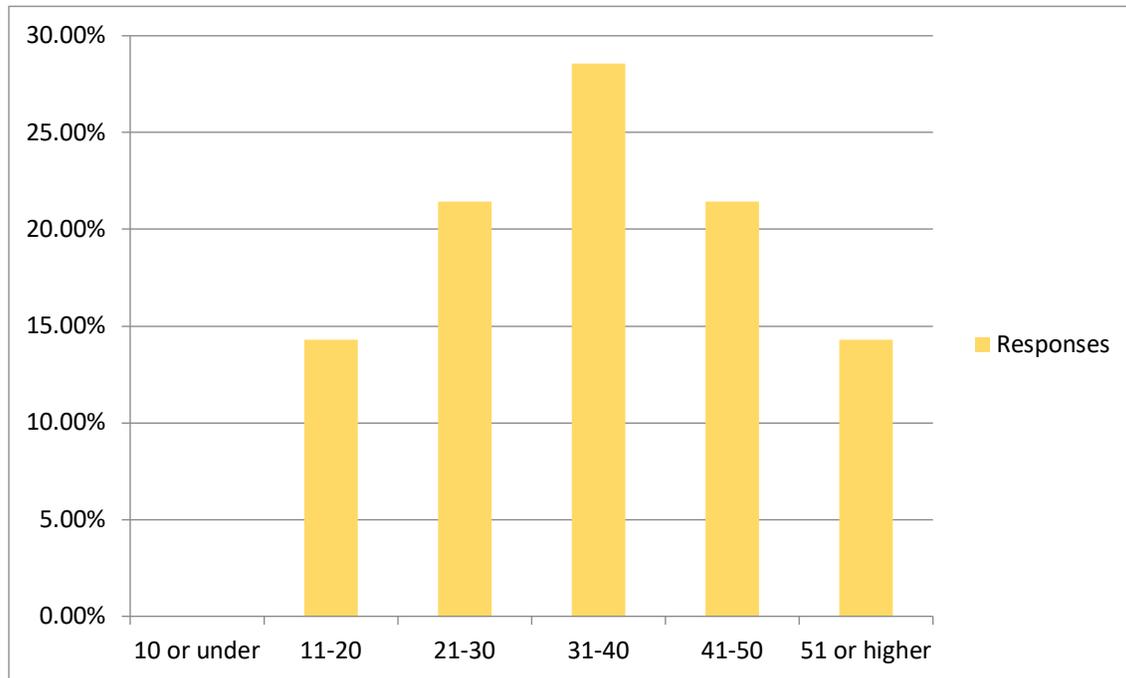
Only five of the fourteen former interns were working at traditional magazine or book publishing firms or freelancing as writers, editors or other publishing professionals.

Question 6: What is your job title or, if you are self-employed, your profession?

Once we drilled down to what work former interns were doing now, most of them were using the skills they acquired during their internships and demonstrating their interest in content creation, which was reassuring.

Specifically, eleven of the former interns were involved in writing, editing, research, and/or communications as part or all of their work. Of the three remaining, two were working in other creative industries.

Question 7: How many hours a week do you work? If it varies, please choose the average hours per week you worked over the past 3 months.



If representative of the industry, these results are alarming, as over 71% of respondents worked either too little or too many hours. Specifically:

- 5 people worked 30 hours or less, suggesting precarious employment for over a third of our former interns
- 5 people worked 41 hours or more, 2 of them 51 hours or more, suggesting they needed to work too many hours to pay the bills

The ideal would be a much bigger bump in the middle, showing that industry professionals are able to work full-time while still having the time and money to enjoy their personal lives.

Question 8: How much do you earn, on average? If it varies, please enter your average income per hour and per month over the past 3 months.

Using some rough calculations, we concluded the following:

Average wage: \$24.46

Median (or typical) wage: \$22.50

Geometric mean wage: \$22.28

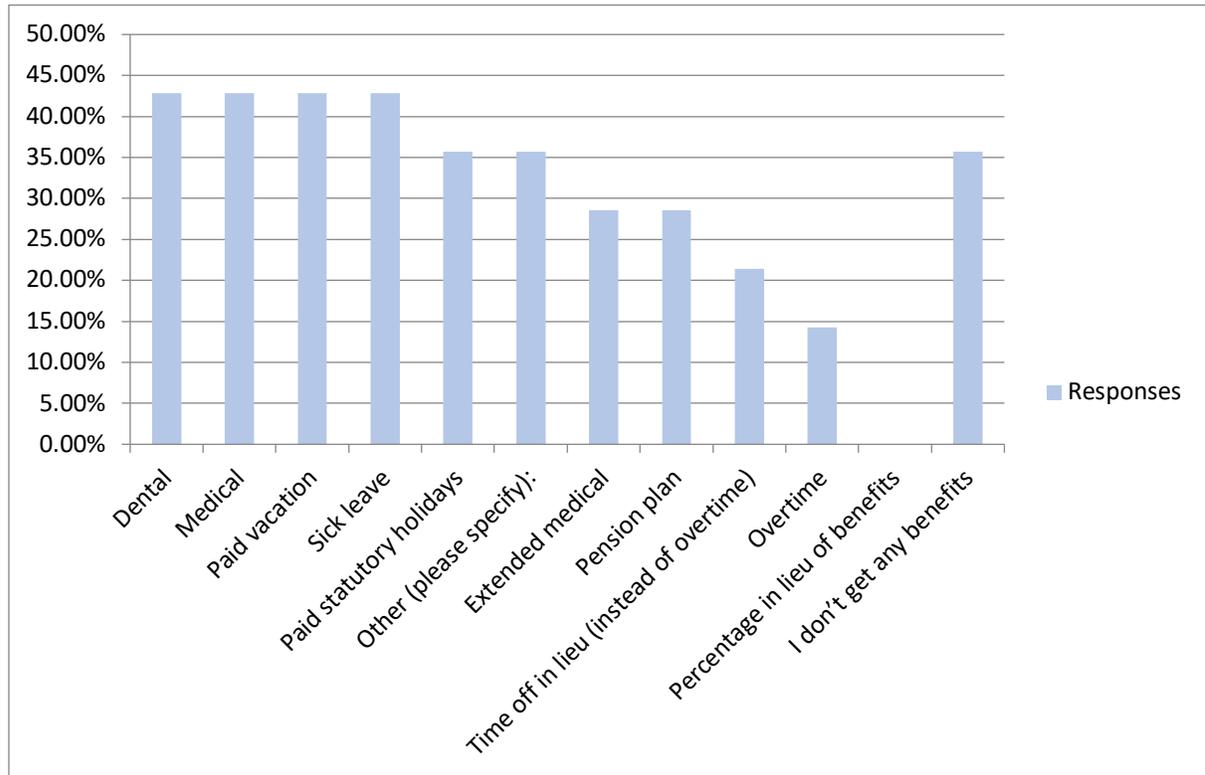
We must caution that some of this is based on monthly earnings divided by average hours worked when hourly wages weren't reported. Taking this into account, it still looks like the former interns weren't making a lot. While this isn't a surprise--publishing and related industries have paid poorly for decades except for those lucky few--it is a little discouraging.

Continued low wages also exclude many professionals from equity-seeking or underrepresented groups, as their average earning power and that of their families is often far lower than the national average, and many cannot afford to earn such low wages while dealing with various financial challenges such as student debt and other barriers.

Breaking out the data a little, the geometric mean for those who interned between 2012-2015 was \$23.06 and that for those who interned between 2016-2017 was \$21.86. Again, it might be just a variance due to the small data set or the fact that the 2016-2017 interns are starting their careers later, but it may also warn of an erosion in earning power.

Note that by contrast, a basic living wage for Metro Vancouver is \$19.50 per hour. (See: <http://livingwagecanada.ca/index.php/living-wage-communities/british-columbia/> for details on BC living wages by region.)

Question 9: What other benefits do you receive, if any? Check all that apply.



We were surprised at the fact that no-one is receiving a percentage top-up in lieu of benefits, as I believe this is required by BC labour law for all but contractors (we even stress to our internship hosts that they need to offer either paid vacation for statutory holidays or a percent in lieu for any interns working on-site), but perhaps many of them are doing contract work, rather than regular or casual part-time hours.

Note also that over one-third don't receive any benefits, and only 43% receive basic benefits like dental, medical, paid vacation or sick leave, which also hints at the precarity of their situations.

Respondents also mentioned they had the following:

- Blue Cross (extended medical)
- Monthly allowance for travel
- Tuition fee waivers

One respondent said that their benefits came from their husband's insurance, which is lucky for them, but means the number of people with benefits from their own work is even lower than illustrated above.

Question 10: What is your educational background?

Include only post-secondary education such as degrees and diplomas, for example, Bachelor of English Literature, Concordia University, 2012.

Six respondents had post-secondary degrees in either English, English literature, and/or creative writing, sometimes combined with other disciplines. Of the remaining respondents, four completed education in a business-related field, and three in another creative discipline such as fine arts.

All but one intern has at least a bachelor's degree. If this education is considered necessary for publishing professionals to do their jobs properly, the wages either have to increase, the requirements for an entry-level publishing job have to be lowered so that new professionals can decide whether this career is right for them before taking on a degree program, or there have to be significant student bursaries to encourage more diversity in the industry.

Question 11: How much is the work you're currently doing related to your education?

Not at all: 0%	Somewhat: 21.43% (3)
A little: 42.86% (6)	A lot: 35.71% (5)

One respondent noted that their degree did not teach them to manage people, a gap in training that really needs to be shored up for anyone wishing to advance in publishing.

Question 12: How much is the work you're currently doing related to your internship?

Not at all: 7.14% (1)	Somewhat: 21.43% (3)
A little: 35.71% (5)	A lot: 35.71% (5)

Most respondents used at least a little of the skills and knowledge gained in their internships. This included: writing, copywriting, grant writing and editorial; data entry; project management and administration; sales; and other, more specific skills and knowledge.

Question 13: How useful was your internship position in helping you to find work?

Not at all: 14.29% (2)

Somewhat: 35.71% (5)

A little: 7.14% (1)

A lot: 42.86% (6)

We were gratified to find out that eleven of the fourteen respondents, or about 79%, found their internships either somewhat or very useful in finding work.

Many of the former interns' comments talk about how they either got an interesting job right away because of their internship, or were able to obtain work based on their internship that itself leveraged them into a more interesting position:

"The first job I got after my internship was as the Public Legal Educator at the Justice Education Society in the Vancouver Law Courts. My experience in court with the *National Observer* and doing Facebook Lives certainly helped me secure that job." – Dylan.

"The skills I learned during my internship were the best bargaining chips during job interviews - my broad admin experience set me apart." – Christine Novosel.

"Before working at UBC Sauder I worked at an academic journal at UBC. Working at Geist helped me get that job which was my introduction to working at UBC." – Rebekah Chotem.

"...I decided to move abroad since I was interested in foreign affairs, but had I stayed in Canada and when I will come back, I met a lot of people in and out of the industry thanks to the job." – Clothilde.

Question 14: How useful did you find the skills and experience you acquired in your internship?

Not at all: 7.14% (1)

Somewhat: 14.29% (2)

A little: 7.14% (1)

A lot: 71.43% (10)

The answers to this question were even more favourable, with ten out of the fourteen rating it very useful and another 2 somewhat.

A few comments:

"Facebook Live gave me confidence speaking publicly (although online, you could see hundreds of live viewers streaming the content) and allowed me to develop skills relaying information in real-time and thinking on my feet. After writing nearly 50 articles, I was able to greatly

strengthen my writing skills. ... learning about Indigenous issues and networking with Indigenous leaders and activists was hugely influential and valuable for me." - Dylan.

"... I would have never gotten into the field of copywriting without my [internship] experience ..." – Dylan Gyles.

"I still rely on all the skills I picked up, and I am able to write funding applications very easily." – Christine Novosel.

"I was so fortunate ... to take on many projects and initiatives. My ideas were always considered and implemented, and I was given a huge amount of autonomy over my work. These have been valuable skills at my current employment, ones I couldn't do without!" – Rebeka Chotem.

"Everything I learned in the internship was valuable ..." – Clothilde.

"Data entry not useful" – Anonymous.

Question 15: How useful was the career advice you were given during your internship?

Not at all: 7.14% (1)

Somewhat: 28.57% (4)

A little: 28.57% (4)

A lot: 35.71% (5)

The feedback here is a little disappointing.

A couple of respondents said that their experience and/or mentorship made them realize they wanted to pursue another career instead.

Others talked about the support they received either during or after the internship in terms of discussions about careers, skill development, their writing craft, references to assist in getting other jobs, or understanding and guidance about the publishing industry and working in Vancouver.

The sense I get from both this question's answers and other comments from former interns in our various feedback surveys from 2017-2020 is that each mentorship must both be tailored to the individual needs and interests of each intern regarding their career, and also that there should be people to provide ongoing support and advice to these new professionals once their internships have ended, even if it's on a casual basis.

Question 16: How useful were the connections you made within the industry as part of your internship?

Not at all: 21.43% (3)

Somewhat: 28.57% (4)

A little: 14.29% (2)

A lot: 35.71 (5)

The feedback is even worse here. One intern, Melissa, summed up one of the main problems, “Didn't meet a lot of people from the industry”.

Pairing interns with expert consultants and mentors as well as work with a supervisor for at least 16 weeks is meant to help them create connections within the industry. However, those interns who don't already have a good professional network, e.g. those who don't come from professional families and/or end up interning at a magazine that itself doesn't have broad or deep connections within the industry, may be at a significant disadvantage.

For example, an intern at an established literary or news magazine with many contributors as well as contacts at similar magazines, communities and groups, could with minimal effort expand their network significantly.

An intern working at a small niche magazine that doesn't have many industry connections may struggle to create, much less expand, a useful network of industry contacts.

We need to figure out ways the interns at less connected magazines can organically expand their professional network and feel supported (and give support in turn) as many of the people without these networks are often those who are also underrepresented in our industry.

Question 17: Which skills and experience acquired through your internship did you find to be the most valuable or rewarding?

There was quite a variety of responses, but a few themes emerged:

- Networking and connecting with a community.
- Being given opportunities to work independently, speak up, find one's own voice, or develop partnerships or communities.
- Copywriting and copyediting, often to deadline.
- Event planning

A couple of people said “communication”, but that’s such a broad term, I didn’t feel it was that meaningful a response.

Other responses:

- Bookkeeping
- Grant writing
- Report writing
- Data entry
- Project management
- Advice on one’s own writing
- Investigative journalism and interviewing
- Understanding connections between departments

Question 18: What was the least valuable or rewarding? The most difficult aspects of your internship?

Again, there were quite a variety of responses. A few comments underlined that MagsBC and the host magazines needed to do better with the following:

- More supportive leadership and supervisors.
- Clear, written roles, duties and responsibilities, both for the intern and who they’re reporting to.
- A single supervisor who channels all work and feedback to and from the intern, is reliable and focused, and who has good management and time skills.
- In a larger company, an organizational chart and a list of who does what and who to go to for what, as well as what opportunities for growth and advancement are available to the intern and how to access them.
- Understanding of and strategies to combat tokenization, negative bias and micro-aggressions by the publisher, especially if an intern is from an equity-seeking group.
- Career advice tailored to each intern’s background, experience, needs and career aspirations. (I gave examples of the kinds of career advice a mentor could talk to their intern about during my site visits; unfortunately, some took this as instruction even if the advice for that particular intern was not useful or relevant.)
- Interns provided with thorough training and useful resources to help them successfully accomplish very magazine-industry-centred tasks. For example, a couple of interns struggled with circulation and subscription campaigns, another with crowdfunding.

Other feedback:

- Some interns found working with a small team, office politics and dynamics, communicating with bosses, attending industry events, or being dependent on approval to get things done to be most difficult. These all seem like typical workplace issues, and a couple of interns acknowledged this.
- One person felt that knowing most people don't appreciate printed magazines any more was the most difficult aspect. Their placement with a small niche magazine may have negatively coloured their perception of how print magazines are received and may indicate future interns at similar publications may need to be given opportunities to talk with more industry professionals.
- A couple of interns found working remotely to be the most difficult part of their job; this will have to be kept in mind in terms of support, communication and connection as many future interns may now be expected to work remotely for magazines.

Question 19: What were the main barriers to finding a job in your chosen field?

Top: Jobs/Compensation (eight of the interns)

- "I love publishing and dreamed of working in it but could not justify the low salary, lack of benefits and entry level positions." - Anonymous
- "I realized I might as well resign myself to a life of restaurant work and get to actually make art and write on my own terms than work "in the arts"/publishing." - Anonymous
- "Most organisations rely on freelancers nowadays so most journalists end up freelancing whether they like it or not ... "Finding a job" as a freelancer then means finding enough work to live so the barriers can range from lack of connections to editors to lack of budget from newsroom ... rates are extremely low even at prestigious Canadian newspapers so you need to hustle during long hours to find enough work to pay the rent." – Clothilde
- ".. High cost of living in the city. Expectation of volunteer or unpaid work." – Anonymous

Potential Employers

- Focused on the interns' qualifications that were not relevant to the position, rather than the ones that were.
- Wanted more marketing experience (the intern had a year's worth, which really should have been sufficient).
- Lack of experience outside of internships and not knowing the right people were also barriers to employment.

Other

- Staying on top of relevant industry trends and competition

Question 20: What suggestions do you have on helping others overcome these barriers?

Responses:

- It is do-able and important to explain to potential employers how your diverse experiences strengthen your qualifications, instead of detract.
- Develop other marketing skills, like graphic design and html, and CSS.
- Digital marketing to increase the market
- [Offer] short-term publishing courses (rather than a master's degree) for people interested in publishing
- Look for things that are similar to your passion, but might give you different unexpected opportunities
- Branch out! Research how else you could use your skills rather than only in the creative side of publishing
- Find a flexible, casual nighttime job so you have your days open to write/create on your own terms
- [Not really] overcoming those barriers, but managing my expectations and focusing on any success I did experience, and not letting all my self-worth come from the work I thought I should be doing but wasn't able to because of the closed off systems and/or gatekeepers
- Network!

- Get out to events and talk to people! Make yourself and your intentions known. Be humble
- Excellence in journalism is necessary but connections is the most important part nowadays. Given the scarcity of jobs, editors will generally hire people who are excellent and who they know and their peers know.
- Developing a strong personal social media "brand" i.e. being competent [and] personable on Twitter where all journalists are and get noticed for your excellent work and for your humor, congeniality, etc.
- [To overcome] "barriers" into freelancing, thorough internet research to find out the right editors help, having lots of savings as well as good knowledge of accounting helps, developing strong relationship with several editors whose publications pay relatively well and regularly need pieces, getting into TV especially freelancing for foreign ones (they pay better and in euro or USD). There are a lot of newsletters, groups and internet resources to guide new freelancers nowadays and find connections/share work
- Canada/BC/Vancouver would need to invest in the arts more for there to be greater opportunities and funding within the industry

Question 21: What areas do you feel you need more training in? We will use these comments to help us plan future professional development events, so please be as specific as possible.

Top

- Job search and career development skills: how to improve their CV, how to connect with editors, how to interview well in a job interview, other courses to take, other potential careers to investigate that require the same skill set and passion. [This was supposed to be covered by the mentors, but obviously wasn't.]
- Time management, strategies for working from home, possibly including useful co-work/remote-work technological platforms, editorial time management/organization

Others

- What the future of journalism will look like: As print media disappears, what will jobs look like? How many jobs are out there? What kind of salary can a new journalist expect?
- Project management
- Training on the practical aspects of a career in journalism/magazine publishing, e.g. training on handling interactions with employers, such as how to negotiate a salary, how to pitch a story, how to discuss edits, how to objectively receive feedback
- How to interview skillfully for an article
- Marketing
- Circulation
- Digital
- Grant writing
- Financial planning
- Copyright law

Question 22: Are you planning to continue in your chosen field, or are you considering a career change?

Planning to continue and advance in my chosen field 64.29% (9)

Considering a career change 7.14% (1)

Working/studying toward a new career 7.14% (1)

Already made the move to a new career 21.43% (3)

Question 23: Would you be interested in becoming a mentor to one of our interns in the future?

Yes 35.71% (5)

Depends: 28.57% (4)

No 35.71% (5)

A gratifyingly high number of former interns (9) either were interested in mentoring or would consider it under the right circumstances.

Question 24: Is there anything you've done since your internship that you're especially proud of? Please tell us about it!

Note that some respondents wished to remain anonymous, and asked us to take out any identifying details.

"I'm very proud of Gladue Report Writing. My writing skills, which this internship helped me hone, have helped me greatly in writing these 20-30 page reports for provincial judges across the province." – Dylan

"Becoming a core part of the production team at a magazine that covers things I care deeply about, and helping to shape the editorial direction and do long-range planning." - Anonymous

"Landing my current position was a big accomplishment, it's the first time I've been hired solely based on my writing skills." – Dylan Gyles.

"I hosted a fashion show for a non-profit!" – Anneke Feuermann

"I have helped over 100 participants develop their creative and communication skills through workshops I have facilitated. I never thought I would have the confidence to lead groups or get up in front of a room and orchestrate people." – Christine Novosel

"I am proud of the career progression I have had and the major pivot [to UBC Sauder]" – Rebekah Chotem

"I moved from Vancouver ... to really commit to music. I have several independent cuts and am currently taking meetings with music publishers as well as developing my own music. It's a "10 year town" but I truly believe I'm pursuing an authentic goal." - Anonymous

"I was selected to be part of an investigative seminar in Banff where I met talented colleagues and inspiring editors. I published stories in *the Globe and Mail*, *the Washington Post*, *the Guardian*, *Wired*. I was a freelance for CBC and Al Jazeera. I highly believe I would not have been able to do that without having gone through National Observer." – Clothilde

"Back in my passion for writing" – Melissa.

"I worked at an international magazine and ended up writing A LOT! From full-length features and advertorials, to ad copy and email newsletters—I was involved in almost every aspect of production. I loved it!" – Laura.

“I work as a permanent part time book store clerk ... and am now a senior editor of [a poetry magazine], as well as holding many other jobs, including teaching a creative writing course ..., hosting a podcast, running a reading series and have published five books since my internship. ... I am proud that I can contribute to the literary community, in what I hope is a meaningful way, and to help create opportunities for those who want to enter the community.” – Anonymous.

Question 25: What other comments, questions, praise or criticism can you share with us about the Internship Subsidy Program or MagsBC?

Note: * means included in the 2020-2023 funding application to CPF.

MagsBC – Improvements Needed

- More contact with MagsBC during the internship. *
- More engagement

Mentors – Improvements Needed

A mentor ... who was not connected to the employer ... in order to have someone [in the same industry e.g. journalism] to ask informal questions of and receive general support from. *

Internship Subsidies – Requirements

We wanted to hire an intern last winter but we were concerned about our ability to come up with enough work for them to meet the 20hrs/week quota. It would be much more possible, much less stressful to take on an intern if that quota were flexible. *

Kudos

“Before my internship, I had no idea what I wanted to pursue as a career. I owe my current success to my time at Geist.” – Dylan Gyles

“It was awesome - these publishing houses are amazing, especially the local ones as they have a passion that is so amazing and unique, to learn from them was an honour and I hope they receive continued support as they grow and succeed.” – Anneke Feuermann

"I really enjoyed my time at *Geist* and appreciate the opportunity MagsBC provided me. I learned so much at *Geist*, made amazing connections and friends, and was given so many opportunities to grow as an individual and a professional. Thank you!" – Rebekah Chotem

"Sylvia was helpful and generous with her time—the first person I ever reached out to in magazine publishing! At the end of the day publishing wasn't a great fit for me (also, *Geist* really wasn't a great fit for me)- but I appreciated the opportunity to get my foot in the door." – Anonymous.

"Thank you for giving us this opportunity. I would have never been able to work at *National Observer* without you. I started as an intern and was later hired as a staff journalist. The work was amazing and it was only stopped because of reduction of budget." – Clothilde

"I appreciated the mentorship conversation greatly!" – Laura

(The final few survey questions were of a more pragmatic nature, e.g. whether they wanted to be added to our mailing list, or how they wanted to be quoted, so are not relevant to this report.)