

Abstract

This internship was at the Mayborn Museum Complex, a part of Baylor University, in Waco, Texas and was completed in the summer of 2013. I interned in the Promotions and Events Department full-time for ten weeks. My main responsibility was managing teen volunteers. I also participated in other aspects of promotions and events, including membership processing, taking promotional photographs of the museum, assisting in event planning, and giving tours.

Engage, Explore, Enjoy:
An Internship at the Mayborn Museum Complex

by

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An Internship
Approved by the Department of Museum Studies

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Arts

Approved by the Internship Chairperson

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Baylor University's Department of Museum Studies requires that each student complete an internship, a professional project, or a thesis as part of the Masters of Art degree. As a student of this program, I felt that doing an internship would be the most beneficial to me as I am hoping to enter the workforce immediately after graduation. The Department of Museum Studies has specific criteria that these internships must meet in order for it to be deemed an acceptable internship. The internship must be 40 hours a week and last ten weeks. The museum must be professionally staffed and conducive to the intern expanding his or her knowledge of the field. I applied for the Promotions and Events Internship at the Mayborn Museum Complex (MMC) at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, as it met all of these requirements and I was eager to gain experience in this area of museum work. The museum is described in the Baylor University Catalog:

The Sue & Frank Mayborn Natural Science and Cultural History Museum Complex at Baylor University includes the Harry & Anna Jeanes Discovery Center, the Gov. Bill & Vara Daniel Historic Village, and the Strecker Museum Collection. The Mayborn Museum Complex brings together in one location the resources of hands-on discovery rooms and interactive natural science and cultural history galleries, including outdoor exhibits. This unusually rich combination provides a wide spectrum of engaging learning opportunities for all types of learners and visitors of all ages. The exhibits and education programs encourage families to learn together as they make choices and design their own museum experience. The multifaceted Museum Complex also serves as a learning laboratory for Baylor University students in the Department of Museum Studies, as well as many other disciplines across campus.

Throughout the school year, thousands of school students participate in a variety of educational programs at the MMC. During the summer, the focus is on providing tours to dozens of summer camps from all over the Central Texas area. In order to accommodate these summer tours, the MMC recruits the help of high school-aged volunteers. The Promotions and Events Department intern at the MMC manages these teen volunteers. The goal is to give the intern an experience where he or she will acquire new skills and grow as a museum professional. The applicants from which the MMC selects the intern are students enrolled in Baylor University's Department of Museum Studies. I was fortunate enough to be selected for the internship in the summer of 2013.

My experience in the internship was ripe with learning opportunities. Not only did I learn a lot about managing teen volunteers, I also gained experience in other areas of promotions and events, and I completed the internship feeling that I had grown professionally. I documented these experiences in a weekly journal which I discussed with my faculty advisor.

The director of the MMC, Dr. Ellie Caston, is also a Museum Studies professor and acted as my advisor throughout the internship. I turned in my journal to her at the end of the summer. Although she is the MMC director, Dr. Caston reassured me that she would read the journal not as the director, but as my professor. She also said that if I had any quandaries to write about, no one would be reprimanded as a result of anything I had written. This was most helpful as it allowed me to write freely. Writing in the journal gave me the ability to later recall the learning experiences I had and reflect on what I did correctly or what I could have done better. The overarching theme of my journal can be summed up in a sentence repeated throughout it: "Communication is key!"

The communication flow of the MMC was something I had to learn on day one. Staff within the different departments communicate with other departments through the proper channels. For example, as the Promotions and Events intern, I could not email a member of the Visitor Experience Department about sitting in on their meetings without first emailing my supervisor, Carol Nowlin, the coordinator of volunteers and events, who would then contact the assistant director for Promotions and Events, who would then communicate with the assistant director of the Visitor Experience Department. At first this did not make a whole lot of sense to me. On days when the Visitor Experience Department desperately needed help getting tours started, Becky Hansen, the assistant coordinator of volunteers, and I would jump right in without giving it a second thought. Becky said it was her understanding that although it is best to go through the proper channels of communication, we should also help each other out in times of need. This was a gray area that I had trouble processing at first. But by the end of summer, I realized the importance of the MMC's communication flow. It kept everyone on the same page. However, sometimes we had to make judgement calls that required us to break with this protocol and that was

okay. I learned that in the work environment, the best solution is not always going to be perfect.

After I had a couple of weeks to settle into my duties, I started spending Mondays integrating other areas of the Promotions and Events Department into my experience outside of volunteer management. I processed memberships, took promotional photographs of the museum, spent time learning about event planning, and ended the day with the assistant director, Mark Smith. One afternoon, Mark showed me some of his public relations duties. This included contacting the local newspapers to ensure that they had all the correct information to publish about upcoming MMC events. A lightbulb went off for me when I realized that I had done the exact same thing as a volunteer for the Historic Waco Foundation, in Waco, Texas. Prior to that day, if I had been asked whether or not I had promotional or public relations experience, I would have said no. “Pretty exciting realization” was what I wrote in my journal that evening. Since then, I have been reviewing past work and volunteer experience to see if I have any other hidden skills. Spending Mondays with the rest of the department was a nice break from managing the teens. However, working with these adolescents brought its own set of challenges from which I learned a lot.

The teen volunteers did not arrive until three weeks into the internship. I spent this time preparing their manuals, making name tags, and entering their information into Volgistics, the online volunteer management database the MMC utilizes. Once the teens arrived, Carol, Becky, and I had four days in a row where we trained them on museum policies and procedures and on how to give tours. After the teens started giving tours, I was responsible for checking on them and making sure that the tours ran smoothly. The teens also helped with special activity days, which took place every Wednesday.

On one of these special activity days, I got yet another lesson in the importance of communication. On this particular Wednesday Becky was on vacation, so I was in charge of a half-dozen high school-aged volunteers. About an hour into their volunteer shifts, I asked each teen if they would like to take a break while I manned his or her station. They all declined. A few minutes later, as I was making my rounds at the museum, I realized most of the volunteers were missing. I eventually found four of them

in the volunteer room taking a break. Although I was annoyed that they had left their stations unmanned, I realized that it was because of my failure to communicate clearly that they had done so. My journal entry for that day said, "I should have been clear that they were not to take a break without first waiting for me to cover their stations." I learned a lesson on the importance of clarity in communication. Other days involved communication of a different kind: strategizing. Strategizing was something that I could not have gotten through the summer without.

Becky and I did a lot of strategizing after a particularly challenging group of summer camp kids came in for a tour. We discussed how we could deal with a group like that in the future. The two of us then sat down with Lanna Palmer, coordinator of school services, and discussed some of our ideas. That group was a local summer camp whose leaders were not engaged with their kids and did not take action when they misbehaved. Right in front of me, one child, who looked to be eight-years-old, deliberately pushed another child to the ground as hard as he could. Their leader did not say anything to them so I stepped in and told them to stop pushing each other. The strategy that Becky, Lanna, and I came up with later was to emphasize to the camp leaders the importance of disciplining their groups. A few days later that same summer camp came in again and the leaders were much better about reprimanding their kids when necessary. That day stood out for another reason; by telling the kids in that camp to behave, I had made a judgement call. Feeling comfortable with making judgement calls like that was one of the many ways I grew as a professional over the summer.

When I first started as an intern, I was reluctant to take the initiative and make such judgement calls without first consulting someone else. Like learning how the museum's communication flow worked, I also wanted to make sure that I was never overstepping my boundaries. Eventually I learned where those boundaries were and felt comfortable making split-second decisions.

"I rolled with the punches and made everything work." I wrote that in my journal after a particularly stressful day at the museum. We had a very large group come in, with not enough volunteers, and the group arrived 45 minutes late. In addition to these difficulties, Becky was out so I

had no choice but to step up and make important decisions. I could not have gotten through this day without practicing good communication and strategizing with members of the Visitor Experience Department. I went home that evening feeling confident in myself and my abilities as a leader. I later had the chance to reflect on this and the rest of the learning experiences during my final evaluation at the end of the summer.

This evaluation took place the last week of the internship. I evaluated myself, my supervisors, and the internship itself. My supervisors evaluated me and then we discussed what conclusions we had come to and submitted our thoughts to Dr. Caston. At first I described the process in my journal as “excruciating;” however, after the evaluation was complete, I stated that “It ended up being a valuable exercise.” I found it beneficial because I had to really think about what I had accomplished over the ten weeks of the internship. I had accomplished more than I realized. The assessment also gave me the opportunity to pinpoint areas that I needed to improve upon. It was equally enlightening sitting down with Becky and Carol and reading what they had to say about my work. I have been evaluated by employers before, but this was the first time I had ever had the opportunity to thoroughly discuss my performance. Hearing their full critique gave me the tools I needed to continue the learning process long after the internship had ended. Assessing my supervisors was also something I had never done. I felt that they valued the feedback I gave them. I hope if I am ever a supervisor, that I will have the opportunity to receive feedback from my staff.

The final step in the evaluation was for me to give them recommendations on what they can do to improve future interns' experiences. One of my recommendations was that they begin integrating the intern into the all aspects of the Promotions and Events Department on the first week of the internship, rather than waiting for the third week like they did with me. I also recommended that they have small projects planned ahead of time for the intern to work on during slow days when there are not any tours scheduled. Carol and Becky were genuinely interested in the suggestions I made. This further reinforced the importance of the evaluation process.

I realized by the end of the internship that my career goals lie in the promotions and events area of the museum field. I feel that I can now enter the museum workforce and be taken seriously. The Promotions and Events Internship at the Mayborn Museum Complex was challenging from start to finish, but those challenges brought many learning experiences and I am a better person for having them.