Summer Internship Report 2017

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High Desert Museum
Bend, Oregon

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

This summer I worked as an intern at the High Desert Museum, a non profit organization that houses local wildlife and showcases living history all with efforts to educate the public. As an intern, I had the responsibilities of caring for the animals that were at the museum because of their inability to survive out in the wild due to injuries or being imprinted. I handled the husbandry aspect of caring for the many animals that came from rehabilitation centers, (river otters, porcupines, badgers, skunks, Great Horned Owls, hawks, falcons, and many others) cleaning their mews and sorting out their diets. I was responsible for making the animals as comfortable as possible, working to enrich their experience to mimic that of the wild. I also participated in our "Raptors of the Sky" flight show where I worked behind the scenes to release birds from their boxes so they could fly over the crowd while a speaker talked about the species. A big part of my internship was public speaking and environmental education, giving 10-15 minute talks about our "Desert Dwellers" and "Birds of Prey". In order to give these talks I had to be very well versed on the subject and at the end be prepared to answer questions anyone had.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

My boss told me during my orientation that the biggest impact I would make while at the museum is the relationships I will build with the animals. These animals have no hope to survive in the wild, so the time they spend with their handlers are the closest interactions they will be able to make. I spent countless hours bonding with the many animals at the museum, handling birds on the glove and taking our skunk on walks so that they can experience new environments. I learned how to respond to a change in the animal’s body posture or attitude, and how to make them more comfortable. I made a large impact on a small group of animals with the dedication I showed to them. I am now able to work with a wide variety of animals thanks the knowledge I gained from the hands on experience I had while an intern at The High Desert Museum.
Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

Sewanee's small population makes it easy to communicate with peers and organize tasks. My internship with the wildlife sector of the High Desert Museum was similar to Sewanee as we were a small group, however, the tasks at hand were much more public and time sensitive. From Sewanee I learned that sometimes you have to take charge and be a leader to get things done in a group, and I found that to be relevant at my internship as well. Sometimes this summer, communication lacked and I found myself having to step up as an intern to get things done on time.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

There were many times where there was confusion right before a talk as people would not know their roles because we had not done a proper job organizing our roles. Sometimes I was frustrated when I was in the middle of a task and was called down to give the talk, or walk the badger, or bring out the porcupine (all roles interns participated in for our talks). After experiencing days when the talks went perfectly, and then comparing them to the days where there was confusion, my fellow interns and I were able to organize a schedule where every role was broken down and explained. This made it so that people signed up and got everything prepared well beforehand. This summer I learned that while it sometimes is easy to decide what task you are going to do and then bust them out yourself, it's much more productive and effective at other times to communicate with peers.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

I am now more confident in my choice to focus on environmental education. After giving talks to the public on the animals I worked with everyday at my internship, I found it extremely rewarding to show people how interesting and important these animals, and the work being done with them, really was. Everyday that I gave a talk, I found myself responding with "that's a great question, and I actually don't know the answer, so I'll have to look it up" because no matter how much I thought I knew on the subject, there was still something to be learned, and often, it was young children asking these questions and opening my eyes. Having the opportunity to educate people eager to learn is something I found fulfilling and could see myself continuing to do in life. I want to make sure I choose a career path that allows me to never stop learning new things, and this internship showed me a possibility.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

The internship I had this summer attracted interns from an array of different degree backgrounds. I myself am majoring in Natural Resources and the Environment, but many other majors had graduated with Marine Biology, Zoology, and Biology degrees. Many interns had also come from previous internships where they had worked with animals already. I had to be open to accepting help from fellow peers when it came to things such as falconry knots and getting a Great Horned Owl on my glove for the first time. I found that I was able to learn a lot of different approaches to tasks at hand, and just observing often gave me a handle on how to better do things.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

Growing up I would visit the High Desert Museum every summer, thinking about how incredible it would be to work closely with the animals and educate people on the environment we were surrounded by. This summer I was able to do just that. I'd like to thank my funding donors as they made it possible for me to educate a new generation, eager to learn, just as I once was.