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WNC Summer Internship Report
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Washington National Cathedral Internship

The idea that our nation should have a worship space for “national purposes” was first discussed by George Washington and his peers in the late 1700s. In 1791, George Washington commissioned Pierre L’Enfant to begin designing and planning this worship space in our nation’s capital. Well over a century later, due to the Spanish American War among other reasons, the first Chapel was opened at what would eventually become Washington National Cathedral. Over 200 years after Washington’s initial conversation with L’Enfant, his vision is alive, and has also evolved to not just be a center for Christian worship, but a place for all faiths to meet for worship and reflection.

This summer I had the privilege to work at Washington National Cathedral under both the directors of programs and preservation. Initially coming into the summer it was understood that I would be working primarily under the Director of Programs, Ruth Frey, working on promotional literature for upcoming events, creating online articles to reflect on completed programs, and more. While expecting to work with Ruth, the Director of Programs, I was also told in the weeks leading up to my arrival in DC that they had expanded my duties to also work with Jim Shepherd, the Director of Preservation at the Cathedral.

I think the biggest skill that I learned over the course of the summer was to be flexible in my agenda, roll with the punches, and to learn how to balance multiple projects with upcoming deadlines. I could come in one morning with a plan to complete a certain task, but then be told that morning, that I needed to work on something else in another part of the Cathedral and have that done by lunch. The biggest example of this was in the first few days of my internship.

On my third day at the Cathedral, Ruth informed me that she was accepting a new position in New York, and she would be leaving. So my initial belief that I would be primarily working in Programs, while also lending a hand in the Preservation department, in fact turned into Primarily working with Jim for the rest of the summer, while also assisting Ruth complete projects under tight deadlines due to her departure.

One of the big projects that I was able to complete during my summer (my first, in fact), was to go over a task force report that a committee had produced on a specific issue, and get that ready for publishing. So my duties were to format the document in an attractive way in the Cathedral's brand, create a bibliography for the report, and to make sure that the final document was all cited correctly. After the completion of that task, the task force report was then published by various news outlets including the Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, and New York Times. It was extremely satisfying to see something that I helped with (even if my roll was minor compared to the rest of the taskforce) recognized in outlets that the majority of people have heard of and have access to.

The second, and most time consuming project I worked on was one that unfortunately I will not be able to see the end of. Over time, the Cathedral has received many amazing treasures from generous donors. Some of those artifacts include a first edition King James Bible that once belonged to Price Henry, portraits of historical figures including George Washington, and valuable furnishings such as an antique Tiffany Co grandfather clock. My job was to begin creating an organized digital database to keep track of the donor, location, age, physical description, etc. of an item for future records. The end goal of the project is to hopefully be able to provide the provenance of any item on the Cathedral grounds.

While I believe that the most helpful skill I developed this summer was the ability to be flexible and to be able to work under a time crunch, I also developed many other skills. I was able to learn how to develop attractive publications in Adobe InDesign, create inventory catalogs of furniture and other possessions of the Cathedral, balance budgets while tracking expenses, and more. I consider myself very fortunate that I was able to develop and expand various different skills all while serving the Episcopal Church, a community I have grown up in and become fascinated with the history of.

As far as future careers go, I unfortunately never had an “aha moment”, where it all of a sudden hit me in regards to what I’d like to do with my life. Fortunately, however, I have developed a great deal of skills this summer that I am confident will serve me in whatever field I end up in. I also have been invited to compose a job proposal for the Cathedral before they plan their 2017 budget. The project of inventorying everything that the Cathedral owns is an even bigger job than it sounds. The staff at the Cathedral was so thankful for what I was able to do in regards to starting a database for them, that they would like for me to return after school if they can find the funds to hire me. Whether or not that opportunity ends up working out, it’s a great feeling to have the work I have done recognized and appreciated to the extent of my boss wanting me to return in a year. I have been extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to have such an amazing internship experience this summer, none of which would have been a possibility without the opportunities and resources that Sewanee offers through the Career and Leadership Development office.