

Brooklyn Bridge Park has become a place to visit not only for tourists who visit the largest city in the United States, but a destination for a large amount of New Yorkers who can bring friends and family to the park for endless activities and enjoyment. The 86-acre park stretches almost two miles along the southwestern edge of Brooklyn on the East River facing the southern tip of Manhattan. And while the park is aesthetically pleasing to visitors searching for a view of the skyline view of NYC, it is also a place where park-goers can run, bike, play, and learn about the vastly interesting history of Brooklyn and its impact on the bustling city the borough is a part of.

The site on which the park rests is a post-industrial area that the New York and New Jersey Port Authority once claimed. Today, the area that makes up the park is owned by an organization called the Brooklyn Bridge Park Corporation that partners with a not for profit organization called the Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy. In 2009 construction throughout the 6 piers that make up the greater park area began, and today they hold areas of restored native wetlands and forest as well as athletic fields and courts, play areas for children, picnic areas, and restaurants. The Corporation and the Conservancy are now working together in an attempt to help the park continue to prosper and be a popular destination for Brooklynites and tourists alike.

Spending a summer at the Brooklyn Bridge Park as a summer associate helped me to understand the importance and necessity of a green space in a densely-populated urban area. As an employee, I was an important part of the system that is responsible for putting on over 400 public events annually. Since the park is relatively new, the typical

schedule for a summer associate is rarely consistent from week to week. The other associates and I were employed to set up and run numerous free events that the park holds, and following the events, work together to break everything down and move on to whatever was next. I served consistently as an instructor in kayak camp classes, as well as a coach of a soccer clinic held once a week on the Pier 5 soccer fields. Along with my typical weekly duties, I took part in assisting the horticulture program that both the Brooklyn Bridge Corporation and Conservancy worked with to improve the growing biodiversity of the environments within the park.

The kayak camp at the park is a summer program where local schools and camps schedule their students/campers to spend a day learning the basics of kayaking. All in all, working the kayak camp may have been the most fulfilling part of my job this summer. In previous jobs I had never had the opportunity to work with children, and before this program started, I was anxious. However, after working with groups of kids, most of whom did not know how to swim, my presence in the water with them was crucial to them. Upon getting in the boats, most were very weary of their safety in the water, but with some guidance and encouragement, their nerves were calmed and excitement ensued. While it was our job to help the kids have an enjoyable experience on the water with their classmates, it was not always easy going. My work during the camp helped me to improve on my leadership and communication skills, as it was imperative for me to instruct the kids with clear and concise directions. At first it was frustrating, for we did not seem very effective in communicating or convincing in our instruction; however, as

the weeks passed we were able to successfully aid the new kayakers with efficiency and ease. The kayak camp program was capped off very well with a group of campers who returned to the park three weeks in a row. We watched the kids become more comfortable and confident on the water week by week, and finished the extended session by leading a 5-mile paddle from Pier 2 at the park to Red Hook, on the southern tip of Brooklyn. It was extremely rewarding to see first-hand the progress that each and every one of them had made as a kayaker and as a team member.

While I learned much about the recreational side of park work this summer, I also accomplished work that was closer to my particular interests in terms of my studies at Sewanee. My work with the horticulturists and gardeners at the park helped me to understand the way in which urban ecosystems operate and grow. My job allowed me to learn about the plants and trees native to New York that have been reintroduced and become familiar with the numerous organisms that benefit from these plants and the ultimate effect they have on the biodiversity of the ecosystem as a whole. I was an aid to the horticulturalist for the conservancy, Sarah Ward, and played an important role with the summer projects that the gardening program organized. Such projects included updating the summer plant list the park provides for visitors each summer, accurately identifying the trees planted in the most recent addition to the park, Empire Fulton Ferry, and also helping develop an application the Conservancy started using in the spring of 2014 called “iNaturalist.” The app is essentially a database that is dedicated the plants, animals, insects, etc. where people can record their observations from the natural world

and then post them on iNaturalist with a picture and description as well as a GPS coordinate to determine where exactly the organism was detected. I created multiple projects within the Brooklyn Bridge Park that ranged from plants to trees, and ladybugs to fruits. After creating the pages on the iNaturalist website I would go out into the field and photograph a plant, identify it, write a small description, and then plug it into the database so that anyone else using the app could go to that particular spot and see that plant. This work not only intrigued me because of my being able to be out in the field, but also improved my identification skills as well as expanded my knowledge on numerous natural organisms in an urban area.

My experience as a summer associate at the Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy was truly rewarding. I learned how important a green space in an urban area is to the community, and became extremely satisfied knowing that I could help improve a family's experience at the park with the work I performed. And while spending time as an employee at the park was enjoyable, I believe that I grew more as an individual. Living in a place like New York City is not easy, especially on your own; however, I am very pleased with the overall experience I had in the city, and am grateful for the opportunity that I was given. I am happy to be a part of the Brooklyn Bridge Park community and am devoted to helping the park grow in any way that I can in the future.