

Ashton Stahl  
Dallas Museum of Art  
Summer 2012

Over the course of a nine and a half week period this summer, I had the privilege of interning at the Dallas Museum of Art. During my time at the museum, I worked closely with two departments: Arts & Letters Live and Adult Programs. Arts & Letters Live is the singular all-encompassing literary and performing arts series held within a comprehensive art museum in the United States. The series holds thirty-five events starting in January and continues throughout the month of June each year. The program highlights best-selling as well as award-winning authors, illustrators, actors, and musicians. As an intern, my role consisted of assisting the museum during the BooksmART festival, an entire day dedicated to the enterprise of education that showcases numerous well-known authors and illustrators of young adult and children's literature. My main task was to act as a liaison between Daniel Kirk, author of the *Library Mouse* series, and the museum staff. I also had a prominent part in choosing short stories for the Texas Bound series of 2012. My responsibilities during this series were to send out confirmations to authors who submitted their work to the program, to assist in reading and choosing the best pieces for the read-aloud sessions, to be a part of casting deliberations, and to read as well as to research stories in various anthologies and periodicals. I also answered the museum's ticketing phone line, communicated with the public about the museum's programs, organized audience surveys, and assisted with daily departmental responsibilities.

The other department I worked closely with was Adult Programs. This department coordinates and executes over two hundred programs every year. These programs include the museum's lecture series, performances, films, weekly gallery talks, concerts, and various special events such as the monthly Late Night program. My duties as an intern included helping with monthly Late Night events in June and July as well as weekly gallery talks once a week. I assisted the department in program management by working with guest speakers, volunteers, performers and the general public.

While interning at the DMA, I was able to attain many new skills through my daily tasks and various department projects. During my daily tasks, I was expected to provide premiere customer service while answering the ticketing phone line, assisting in gallery talks, and through my correspondence with

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authors for the BooksmART Festival as well as the Texas Bound series. While answering the ticketing phone line, I had to be prepared for questions not only about our upcoming events, but also about various exhibits and policies for the museum. There were often times where I had to do extra research in order to answer a customer's questions. Having to answer these questions quickly and efficiently pushed me to learn more about the museum outside of the departments I was working in and also gave me great exposure to working with the public and the museum's patrons. During the DMA's weekly gallery talks, I was expected to interact with the public and many of the museum's members. These interactions also helped me to hone my customer service skills and my knowledge of the museum. I received similar exposure through my correspondence with visiting authors. I was expected to answer any questions authors had about events they were to participate in as well as any stories they would like to submit to the Texas Bound series. Through these day to day correspondences, I was able to learn how to professionally interact with writers and entertainers.

In order to complete my tasks efficiently and to make communication easier between myself and the staff members, I was trained to use three different computer programs. The first program I was taught to use was Microsoft Outlook. This program allows the user to set up their own email account and includes a calendar where events can be created either for oneself or an entire department. Another program I was taught to use was the museum's ticketing service, Patron Edge. This program allowed me to easily fill out ticket orders and quickly locate member or event information. The last program I was trained to use was TAZ. This program gave me access to all of the museum's photos and documents. Knowing how to use TAZ was helpful when I wrote blurbs about visiting authors for the museum's website or when I was making informational flyers and needed photos.

Through my participation in the Arts & Letters Live and Adult Programs departments I feel that I now have a better understanding of the museum world and what is necessary to successfully coordinate as well as run museum events. In order for any event to entice the public and run smoothly, every team member needs to do their part and do it well. As an intern, I was pleasantly surprised by how much I was

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expected to be involved in meetings, activities, and in advertising the museum's events. Both departments went out of their way to treat me as more than just an intern. I was a team member whose thoughts and opinions were listened to and valued. This appreciation for my work and participation was reflected in the projects I was assigned. A few weeks after the museum had put on the annual BooksmART Festival, I was asked to create an informational flyer about the event to show at future meetings. I was to create a collage of photos and informational captions that highlighted award winning authors and illustrators who came to the festival. After I finished the BooksmART flyer, I was asked to make another one to advertise events from the whole Arts & Letters Live season. I originally thought these flyers were only going to be used in small meetings at the museum, but the departments liked them enough to take the flyers to a large business meeting in New York where they were used to inform possible investors. I also came to find out that the research and write-up I composed for visiting author Chris Cleave, writer of *Little Bee* and *Gold*, was used on the museum's main webpage. Up until that moment, I did not realize how important my work was to the museum. Not only was my written work appreciated, but my organizational skills and customer service skills were valued. This appreciation was shown when I was assigned to run the gallery tours and the overflow area in the C3 Theater during the museum's Daniel Silva event. Earlier in my internship, I had assisted Adult Programs during gallery talks and Late Night events by acting as a liaison between the department and various musicians and entertainers. I was in charge of the entertainers' schedules and helped familiarize them with the museum. Being in charge of an entire area, however, was a much bigger responsibility. I was not only responsible of getting visitors to their assigned gallery tour, but I also was held accountable for getting visitors to the overflow theater as well as moving ticketholders to the main theater if seats became available. Initially everything ran smoothly. I was able to get all the necessary chairs set up in the gallery and I helped the gallery tour guide set up his paint cart. Things started to go awry when the public began to pour into the museum. Many of the visitors could not remember which tour they signed up for which made gathering them and moving them up to the galleries a bit difficult. There was also an incident where a woman accidentally fell on a painting. Fortunately, the painting and the woman were unharmed. These setbacks, however, did nothing to calm my nerves. After

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the tours concluded, I quickly walked from the gallery area to the C3 Theater where I passed out blank comment cards for anyone who wished to ask Daniel Silva questions about his book and where I also made a few announcements about the event. After moving a few overflow ticketholders up to the main theater, the talk with Daniel Silva began. Although everything did not go exactly as I planned, I still had a great experience. I was able to learn a great deal about how to handle situations professionally and I enjoyed having a leadership coordinating position.

After participating in this internship, I feel that my career goals shifted in a positive way. I originally had no idea what I wanted to do after college or what kind of career I wanted. Now that I have had experience in the museum world doing event coordinating and advertising, I feel that I will most likely choose a career in this field. I may not necessarily focus only on museum work, but I would love to work again with programs similar to the ones I experienced at the Dallas Museum of Art. The DMA is unlike any museum I have ever experienced. There were numerous professional literary events juxtaposed with artistic and musical programs. I never knew that there was a career in which I could incorporate my love for writing and art in a professional setting. Being able to work with the Arts & Letters Live department as well as the Adult Programs team made a huge difference in my life. Not only did the projects and tasks I was assigned help me come to this conclusion, but the people I closely worked with greatly impacted my new career goals. The museum staff that I worked with this summer did everything they could to give me the greatest experience possible. They answered any and all questions I had about the museum, their professions, and also their graduate school experiences. After working and talking with them, I feel like I am now on the right path. I am even considering applying for the McDermott internship at the DMA for next year. Although I am still not completely certain where I am headed in the future, having this internship helped me focus my goals and steered me in the right direction. Anyone who has a love for art and a passion for writing should definitely apply for this internship.