Collections Internships for College Students: Designing an Interdisciplinary Program

Emily Smith, Collections Manager
Randolph College Natural History & Archaeology Collections Project
Natural History Collections at Randolph College

• Begun c. 1895

• Zoological Specimens: Birds, Mammals, Fish, Reptiles, Amphibians, Insects, Marine Invertebrates

• Fossils & Geology

• Herbarium: Indigenous & Introduced Plant Species (Eastern U.S.)

• Human Osteological Specimens

• Antique Wall Charts, Microscope Slides & Lantern Slides

• Archaeological Remains
The Natural History & Archaeology Collections Project (NHACP)

• Begun 2011 with 1 intern, 2 volunteers

• Currently 8-12 interns, 15+ volunteers and 3 work study per academic semester!

• Staff: 1 Collections Manager, 1 Faculty Sponsor, 1 Lab Manager, 6-9 collaborating faculty (variable per semester)
What Our Interns Do:

- Specimen Preparation
- Photography / Digitization
- Cataloging and Inventory
- Tagging and Organization
- Cleaning, Conservation
- Display Design and Installation
- Website Design and Maintenance
- Social Media
- Collections-Based Research
- Educational Outreach
- Art and Creative Writing Projects
Why Internships?

• Recent emphasis on "co-curricular learning"

• Supplement & enhance classroom learning while providing career-related experience

• Students with hands-on experience are more competitive

• Students gain from networking with professionals

• Helps mitigate cost of personnel / staffing
Why Interdisciplinary?

- Randolph College has a liberal arts emphasis
- Collections work is relevant to students outside museum studies or science career fields
- Students from "outside disciplines" bring fresh perspective, innovative approach to tasks
- Students become advocates for the importance of collections: journalism, business, law, education, political science / public policy...
- Collaboration with other departments = expanded possibilities for sources of funding
Why Interdisciplinary?

Dr. Loretta Jackson-Hayes (Rhodes College):
http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/02/18/we-dont-need-more-stem-majors-we-need-more-stem-majors-with-liberal-arts-training/?hpid=z11
Advertising Internships:

- Brochure
- Word of mouth
- Social media: Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr (manage using HootSuite)
- Community bulletin board (online portal)
- Collections bulletin board (in Biology department)
- Direct targeting--professors in related disciplines
- Gold Key (Admissions) tours
- Campus "Involvement Fair" (fall)
Structuring Internships

Consider:

- Collection needs
- Student interests
- Unusual opportunities (including community outreach and networking)
- Joint effort with college's Career Development Center
- Academic requirements for credit

Interns participate in outreach to elementary and middle school students during the Randolph College Science Festival (SciFest).
Academic Requirements at Randolph College NHCAP:

- 3 hours work / week per hour of academic credit
- Weekly workshop attendance (1 hour)
- Writing requirement: reflective paper
- Assigned relevant reading
- Public presentation or display (research projects)
Other Options for Student Involvement:

• Non-credit internships (volunteer)
• Independent study (research projects)
• Work study (paid by academic department)
Managing Internships

Create straightforward systems:

- Clear procedure sheets
- Reference binders
- Project folders
- Project task board
- Log of hours
- Specimen collecting kits
- User-friendly software! (We currently use eHive for online cataloging)
Scheduling

Open workdays:

• students interact with other interns who have different tasks or projects

Weekly & Monthly workshops:

• Weekly: teach collections management skills (digital photography, conservation, cataloging)
• Monthly: topics-based or career development
Effective Internships

- Communication: email, verbal
- Active demonstration
- Accountability, clear expectations
- Approachability
- Productivity
- Timeliness
- Sometimes the best interns are not the best students!
Projects to Consider for Interdisciplinary Internships

- **Specimen preparation / restoration** (art students, biology, pre-vet)
- **Cataloging / data entry** (museum studies, all sciences, library science / archiving, history, archaeology, sociology)
- **Digital photography** (art / photography, biology, journalism, communications)
- **Geology identification / tagging** (environmental studies, geology, chemistry)
- **Wet preps / fluid identification and maintenance** (biology and chemistry)
- **Website development** (business / marketing, computer technology, graphic design, creative writing / journalism, sociology)
- **Display design** (art / graphic design, history, education, museum studies, marketing, creative writing, communications, philosophy)
- **3-D replication and printing** (art / graphic design, technology / engineering, computer science, physics)
- **Virtual gift shop** (business / marketing, art / graphic design, psychology)
Collections-Based Research Projects:

Forensics

- health, age, and gender data for archaeological remains, disarticulated skeletons
- DNA sampling and sequencing

Archaeology

- Minimum number of individuals (MNI) for 6th-century burials at Bir-el-Knissia, Tunisia
- Palynology and phytolith analysis of historic farm sites (proposed)
- Historical & present-day ecology of Randolph College "back campus" (proposed)

Dendrochronology

- species and growth rates of trees on campus

Field Ecology

- Pollinators in Botanic Garden and Organic Garden
- Species most at risk for window kills, roadkill in different seasons (salvage collections)
- Micro- and macro-invertebrate studies of local stream systems (possible)
L-R: Opening reception for "Aves" at Maier Museum of Art; Kiwi skeleton by Khavya Pradhan; Exhibition feature in Maier Museum newsletter

Natural History + Art
More about this program...

SCNet Webinar (March 2015): http://scnet.acis.ufl.edu/content/designing-interdisciplinary-collections-internships-college-students

RC NHACP Web Page: http://naturalhistory.go.randolphcollege.edu/
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/RandolphCollegeNaturalHistoryCollections
Twitter: @RCNatHist
Tumblr: @RCNaturalHistory
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