

Collections/Exhibits Internship Portfolio

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Time Sheets and Activity Logs

Activity Log for Frazier History Museum Intern

January 17, 2018

Noon – 5pm (5 hours)

Activities

* Walk-through of museum – saw collections, the office I’ll be in, the 3 public floors of museum, the basement, and the exhibits office
* Read 100 pages of book on curatorial management (e.g. preserving, marking, photographing, condition reporting, and handling)
* Went over the basics of the collections database, PastPerfect, used for cataloguing objects, artifacts, photos, archives, and etc.

January 22, 2018

9am – 5pm (8 hours)

Activities:

* Researched wireless HOBO data nodes that tell relative humidity and temperature to go inside exhibits to make sure the conditions are acceptable for the artifacts and typed up an overview of them to give to my supervisor, so she can see if the museum can afford to get a new, wireless one
* Went to the meeting with the collections and exhibits staff discussing the things to be done/worked on
* Printed copied documents on Mona Bismarck – her correspondences with other people that she gave to the Filson Historical society in her will
* Organized and put away supplies in the room (they call it “triage”) with crafts and cleaning supplies for the exhibits and artifacts
* Wrote up a mock condition report for a helmet
* Typed a return form for the items on loan from the Kentucky Historical Society

January 24, 2018

7am – 2pm (7 hours)

Activities:

* Helped pack up boxes of items to return to the Kentucky Historical Society into the car of the Collections Technician
* Went to the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort to return objects
* Went to Buffalo Trace Distillery to return objects
* Drove back to the Frazier
* Checked objects on loan from a board member to make sure that all were where they were supposed to be after being uninstalled from the Prohibition Exhibit
* Wrote down accession number of objects that were just uninstalled from the Prohibition exhibit, searched them in the PastPerfect database to find their location, moved them to new locations, and updated the database on their new locations

January 29, 2018

9am-5pm (8 hours)

Activities:

* Went to the meeting between the curators of exhibits and collections
* Helped organize the collections room and rearrange it so we’ll be able to have room objects for the exhibits we are about to uninstall
* Organized and made files for the objects we are about to get on loan for the Mona Bismarck Exhibit
* Looked through some of the exhibits we are about to take down (also so I could familiarize myself with the museum)
* Went through exhibits that are going to be taken down this week and documented the name and lender/donor on pictures of the objects so that they won’t be misplaced when being taken down
* Wrote outgoing condition reports for items on loan from the Louisville Ballet that were not used so that we would be ahead when we uninstall the exhibit this week

January 31, 2018

9am-4pm (7 hours)

Activities:

* Scanned Loan Request Letters onto the computer to add to the files for each lender on PastPerfect
* Scanned Loan Contracts onto a file so that there will be backups
* Wrote outgoing condition reports on items that were not put on display that are from the Louisville Ballet (on loan)
* Put pictures of items that we will be getting on loan from various donors on their files in PastPerfect (for the Mona Bismarck Exhibit that will be going up in March)

February 7, 2018

9am-5pm (8 hours)

Activities:

* Attached photos and descriptions of objects coming on loan for the Mona Bismarck exhibit onto each object’s loan number on PastPerfect
* Wrote outgoing condition reports for the objects that had just been taken down from the Norton Exhibit
* Packed up objects to be returned from donor
* Put information of objects (e.g. location, artist, owner, dates) into PastPerfect

February 12, 2018

9am-5pm (8 hours)

Activities:

* Attended meeting with collections and exhibits staff
* Walked through entire museum and recorded the temperature, relative humidity, and light from the HOBO readers to send to the Smithsonian (because we are requesting an item on loan from them for the Mona Exhibit)
* Organized collections in the area with all of the packing supplies for objects
* Filed loan contracts for the Mona Bismarck Exhibit
* Organized a miscellaneous pile of documents and placed a pile of information on loans in order from oldest to most recent (all from 2017) so that I can assign accession numbers to them (nothing from the year 2017 has any accession numbers)

February 14, 2018

9am-5pm (8 hours)

Activities:

* Found mounts for objects from previous exhibits and paired them with the objects they had been used for (because we are doing a “permanent exhibit” with items that are owned by the Frazier)
* Assigned accession numbers to all of the loans and objects from 2017
* Made files for all of the newly assigned accession numbers and filed them in a fireproof safe in collections

February 19, 2018

9am – 4pm (7 hours)

Activities:

* Assigned even more accession numbers to the loans and objects from 2017
* Filed these files into the file safe in collections
* Organized corner of collections and put new packing supplies in their place
* Organized collections office a bit to make it look fancier/more put together for when the contract workers from everywhere else come in to install the Mona Bismarck exhibit

February 21, 2018

9am – 4pm (7 hours)

Activities:

* Helped uninstall the Poe exhibit
* Wrote outgoing condition reports for Poe objects
* Packed up all Poe objects to be returned
* Watched a historical interpretation to get a glimpse of what the rest of the museum is like
* Called the company that we got some of the packing supplies from because we were only sent one
* Filed even more 2017 loans and objects into PastPerfect

February 26, 2018

9am – 4pm (7 hours)

Activities:

* Went to the meeting between collections and exhibits. It was especially important because three people who are helping out for the Mona Exhibit came in (one is the guest curator and the others are a lady from the Costume Institute of America and her assistant)
* Wrote condition reports for 24 pairs of Roger Vivier shoes that once belonged to Mona Bismarck (incoming reports)
* Helped bring about 5 trips worth of supplies and objects up to the 2nd floor where the Mona exhibit is going
* Helped move an entire model ship from storage into. Different area of storage
* Met the CEO, Penny Peavler
* Painted mounts for the new, permanent exhibit which will have objects like Jesse James’ and Buffalo Bill’s guns

February 28, 2018

9am – 4pm (7 hours)

Activities:

* Cleaned cases for the permanent Founder Gallery Exhibit
* Put up mounts for objects going in the case/drilled into the case’s backboard
* Mounted the objects – Jesse James’ gun, a cane gun, a wreath made of human hair, and two Samurai suits of armor along with a few others

March 5, 2018

9am – 4pm (7 hours)

Activities:

* Attended the weekly meeting
* Helped continue to put up/install the Founders Gallery Exhibit
* Made Mounts for three objects and adjusted/fixed one other one
* Mounted objects for two cases, the last ones that are in the founders gallery except for a side room (which the layout for that case has not been done yet)

March 7, 2018

9am – 4pm (7 hours)

Activities:

* Dusted a giant bronze sculpture on the 1st floor – very carefully and with a paintbrush and teeny-tiny vacuum attachment
* Made copies and scanned papers on objects that we received this week for the Mona Bismarck Exhibit
* Wrote condition reports on objects that just came in for Mona and put it in PastPerfect/took pictures for condition reports
* Helped make sure the lighting was acceptable and low enough so it wouldn’t damage the artifacts 🡪 made UV protectors to go in the lights and measured the brightness on this neat machine
* Put numbers in the case so viewers can identify which texts go to which objects
* Learned how to unlock and lock the cases

March 12, 2018

9am – 4pm (7 hours)

Activities:

* Went to collections/exhibits meeting
* Tacked all of the pictures to the wall in the Mona Bismarck Exhibit so they would stay level, since they were hanging by wires on the backs
* Helped the guest curator hang paintings in the Mona Bismarck Exhibit
* Cut out the signs for all of the objects/put them on foamcore

March 14, 2018

9am – 2pm (5 hours + event)

Activities:

* Met with/shadowed the marketing manager
* Went with her/helped her with her daily tasks such as updating all of the screens around the museum and updating the social media
* Helped cut out fliers for an upcoming event
* Went to the opening night for the Mona Bismarck Exhibit (which was very fancy and had alcoholic drinks and hors d’oeuvres)

March 19, 2018

9am – 4pm (7 hours)

Activities:

* Went to weekly meeting
* Made mounts out of plexiglass that I can keep and use as a cellphone holder
* Went out to lunch with both of my superviors

Helped moved books and bookshelves and other objects into the new collections office

Internship Journal

Isabella Glover

January 22, 2018

I have successfully completed my first 10 hours of working at the Frazier. These 10 hours have been fairly introductory. I was shown around the museum, all the way from the basement to the roof. I was shown that floors one through three are for exhibits, while floor four is most of the offices and the event space. The fifth floor is the roof, where many weddings are held. The place that I will be spending most of my time is the basement. The basement holds the collections and anything pertaining to exhibits before and after they are installed (or uninstalled).

My direct supervisors have quite a bit of varied knowledge of the curatorial field. However, both of them have degrees that are concerned with art, such as art history. One of my supervisors deals with mostly getting object loans from other institutions and ensuring that the exhibits are all in good condition. My other supervisor deals mostly with the objects themselves. She is constantly in the collections room, dealing with condition reports.

The work they have asked me to do so far has been very much for beginners. I read about 100 pages of an up to date book on how to handle museum curatorial work, which contained a substantial amount of valuable information about handling, moving, and insuring the safety of objects when moving them to and from exhibits. I’ve also attended a meeting with the entire collections and exhibits staff, which is about eight people, including interns. I was able to get a glimpse of how progress is made in planning and executing exhibits through that meeting. Overall, I have not done a whole lot during this first ten hours, but I feel like I am on my way to learning more than I could have expected about curatorial work in a history museum.

Isabella Glover

January 27, 2018

This week at the Frazier, I got to go with the Collections Technician to return some items from the Prohibition exhibit that was just taken down. I was able to see how the objects are handled carefully and how they are wrapped, stored, and moved to ensure that they would not be broken. The items we were returning belonged to the Kentucky Historical Society and Buffalo Trace Distillery, both in Frankfort, Kentucky. While I didn’t get to see a whole lot of what these institution’s exhibits looked like, I did get to meet a few people involved in exhibits from these places.

This week I started dealing with the artifacts hands-on. I was left on my own in the collections room and was able to work on checking the items for accession numbers that had just been taken down from the Prohibition exhibit. I looked the numbers up in PastPerfect, which is a database that is used by most museums to record everything they need to know about an object in their possession. Through doing this, I have gained quite a bit of insight into what it is like to uninstall an exhibit. So far, out of every task I have done, working in the collections room with the objects is the most enjoyable to me.

I am supposed to eventually help write condition reports on the objects on loan that are being sent back or that are coming in. Condition reports are for documenting the exact condition the object is in, including if there are any signs of scratches, cracks, and etc. My supervisor had me write up a mock condition report for a helmet that she had in her office so that I could get practice.

Isabella Glover

January 31, 2018

I have started doing a decent amount of tasks at the Frazier. Every Monday there is a meeting with the collections staff and the exhibits staff. This typically lasts for about 30 minutes to an hour. I enjoy these a great deal because I can see what is going on within the entire department, what everyone is working on, and what the upcoming tasks to be done entail. It also makes me become more familiar with all of the staff in the museum’s basement, which comes in handy when I am doing something and I need to ask someone about it.

I have been working more in the actual collections room, dealing one on one with the objects. This is my most favorite part of the job so far. I enjoy dealing with the objects, especially knowing their history. The main thing I’ve been doing is working on condition reports for the objects on loan that are being returned from the lenders. This is a relatively tedious task, but it is easy to get engrossed in it and find out that a couple hours have passed without realizing it.

A big upcoming exhibit that everyone has been working on is the Mona Bismarck exhibit. We are getting quite a few of her items from international lenders. The rest of the items we are receiving of hers are from national museums and private lenders. Every single thing we are getting in for the exhibit is very expensive, so there has been a great deal of stress, especially on my supervisor, to get everything in perfectly with no issues.

February 7, 2018

Isabella Glover

I’ve become a lot more comfortable with the tasks I have been giving. Lately we’ve had a lot of exhibits coming down. Currently there are only about three exhibits on display right now. Since I’ve been an intern, we have taken down the Prohibition exhibit, the Nutcracker exhibit, and the Norton exhibit. None of these exhibits have been replaced yet. Meanwhile, the museum is renovating the first floor, so many of the exhibits in that area had to be temporarily taken down to accommodate the construction workers.

With all of these exhibits being uninstalled, I’ve had to do more outgoing condition reports. I’ve also had to do more packing up objects to be returned to the lenders. Both of these things entail just working in the collections room with the objects. As we get more items in, for example for the Mona Bismarck exhibit and the Southern Exposition exhibit, I will have to begin doing incoming condition reports. These are quite a bit more difficult than the outgoing reports because I have to log all current damages and deteriorations, instead of just noting if there has been any changes to the object’s condition.

I have also been working with PastPerfect quite a bit more. This database is extremely helpful in keeping all of the documents and objects pertaining to an exhibit together. It can tell you the location of the object, give you the loan contract, and provide a description of the history of the object, just to name a few aspects of it. This is an important database to understand fully if I am going to enter into the museum field at any point after this internship.

Isabella Glover

February 13, 2018

I have been working on some of the same tasks for a little while now at the museum. I am finding out that much of museum work, especially on this side of exhibits and collections, is very tedious and time consuming. However, it is easy to get immersed in the work being done. Some of the things I’ve found are crucial to running an efficient museum are making files, creating accession numbers for objects and loans, inspecting objects for any scratches, abrasions and etc., and dealing with a ton of paperwork. Nearly everything you do in a museum takes an extremely long time and must be a thorough process. The past couple times I’ve gone in, they have had me working on assigning accession numbers to stacks of loans from the entire year of 2017.

Before my supervisor was hired, another person was in her role. He did not keep any information up to date in PastPerfect and actually didn’t enter a single item from all of 2017. When my supervisor was hired at the end of 2017, there was a giant stack of loans and papers all waiting to be filed. Something that I have been doing is organizing the loans and assigning accession numbers to them. Assigning accession numbers to objects and loans is a crucial part of being an accredited museum. When looking for an item, you should be able to find everything you need to know about it if you have the accession number.

Isabella Glover

February 15, 2018

Over the last few weeks, I have been doing more and more data entry. While this is very important and crucial to keep the museum up-to-date and running smoothly, it is very tedious work. I’ve been working on filing the same, huge pile of loans for a couple weeks. It has been a long, ongoing project. However, I am understanding more and more why this is important. I have been given objects or papers that have information on objects and been told to find the loan number or the accession number. The only way to do this (since I can’t just scour the entire collections room for the object or just make up a number for an objects) is to look in PastPerfect and search for key terms. If, for example, someone calls and asks about an object their relative donated seven years ago, then we would be able to go into the system and find out any and all information we have on that object. It is a very important and worthwhile database for a museum.

Another thing I got to work on a little bit was finding the mounts for the objects we are about to install. I had to sort through a giant box of mounts and find the ones that go to the objects we have. This was sort of exciting because I got to see the objects up close and I think I will very much like to install an exhibit. The items for this exhibit are items that are in our permanent collections, so items that are owned by the Frazier, which were either donated or bought. This exhibit is supposed to start going up in the next few weeks.

Isabella Glover

February 21, 2018

This week at the Frazier has been even more exciting than almost any other one, mostly because I got to help uninstall an exhibit. The exhibit we took down was the Edgar Allen Poe exhibit which has been up since September 2017. To do this, we had to get two rolling carts and put protective foam on them so that the objects wouldn’t be scratched when being taken down. We also had to have gloves, a blanket to lay the glass of the case down on, and two suction cup glass holders. These suction cup holders are like the things that spies use when they need to remove glass. We used them in the same way, but were not secretive about it and we did not steal anything. We had to suction the glass and lift it up and off of the case and set it on the ground. Next, we carefully removed the objects and placed them all on the carts, replaced the glass and tops of the cases, and moved the objects to collections. It is a fairly simple process, but it was very fun. It makes me think that I would love installing an exhibit even more.

After taking down an exhibit, it is necessary to write outgoing condition reports to make sure that nothing about the object has changed or been damaged since it went on exhibit. This is especially important to do if an item is on loan, which all of the Poe exhibit objects were. I got to do the condition reports for these objects. I also packed them all up in foam and boxes so they could be returned to the lender. I enjoyed this project a lot more than anything else I have worked on.

Isabella Glover

February 28, 2018

There has been a lot going on at the Frazier. Three people who are curating the Mona Bismarck Exhibit arrived this week. One is the guest curator and the others are a lady from the Costume Institute of America and her assistant. They have been taking up a lot of my supervisor’s time and energy. The Mona Bismarck Exhibit is supposed to open on March 15. I have been doing a decent amount of work for this exhibit. I wrote condition reports on 24 pairs of Roger Vivier shoes that Mona had owned.

I also got to install an exhibit this week. This was by far the most exciting part of my experience at the Frazier so far. It started with me just cleaning the cases – the windows and the fabric on the bottom – in which I had to climb inside the cases to do. I felt like a live exhibit. Next, we had to move the objects up from collections. The objects we put in the first case were Jesse James’ gun, a gun that is shaped like a cane (which you cannot even tell it is a gun at all), a wreath made of human hair, a violin, a horn, a rifle, and a quilt. The case was very packed and looked amazing. It was only me and the collections technician who assembled the case. I was able to drill into the walls of the case and hang the items myself, which was very neat and a great experience.

Isabella Glover

March 5, 2018

I’ve been helping to finish putting together the Founder’s Exhibit. This has been an exciting process because it has given a lot of curatorial insight. One of the neatest things I got to do was put together two Samurai suits of armor from the mid 1800’s and the late 1800’s. We had four people total helping to take these from collections and assemble them. There were many different parts to them and the chief curator was the only one who knew exactly how they went. I got to put on the helmet of one of them, which was pretty much an honor. I’ve been able to help with each case that is going in the Founder’s Exhibit. One of the reasons why this is so neat to me is that it is a permanent exhibit, so it’ll be there long after I am gone.

I really love putting together the exhibit and hope I will get to do even more of this type of work. One aspect of it that I really like is the mounting objects and putting the mounts in the walls. It is kind of nerve-wracking to drill the holes in the walls because if it is even slightly crooked, the object will not be straight. We had to redo a couples holes because the drill moved in the wall or the object was supposed to be hung on a now-fragile spot. For example, one of the guns we hung had a screw loose on the spot where it was previously mounted. We had to move the hole to compensate for it. Luckily, the cases are very darkly lit so it is hard to see the mess-ups. It sort of made me realize the precision that is involved in mounting objects.

Isabella Glover

March 7, 2018

I’ve been doing a lot of very fun things at the Frazier lately. One neat thing I got to do was make mounts for an exhibit. I got to cut, bend, and glue together plexiglass. We made plexiglass mounts for three different objects. I also got to make my own plexiglass mount and bend it as a sort of learning craft. I also finally got to see the last part of the exhibit put together. We put together the last case, the General Custer case. I also got to help make sure the lighting was correct on each object. I used a small machine to tell the level of light shining on each object. If the lights are too bright, the objects could be damaged. We had to make UV protectors to go in the lights.

I’m not sure if I’ll be able to do more work on any exhibits after this week because the Mona Bismarck exhibit opens next week and that is the last one that will be put up until summer. The Mona exhibit has taken the most energy out of everyone in collections and exhibits. There has been a lot of communication with museums, people, and companies overseas, but everything for the exhibit is finally in and ready to be installed. However, only outside curators are allowed to do anything dealing with these objects. Regardless, it will be a really awesome exhibit because there are about 40 different outfits, not including shoes, hats, and jewelry. I am very excited to see this exhibit finished.

Isabella Glover

March 12, 2018

The Mona Bismarck exhibit has finally been finished. While there were a lot of other people who had the primary responsibilities of putting the exhibit together, I still feel like I did quite a bit for that exhibit. I had to enter nearly all of the information in to PastPerfect, for example. Most of my time at the Frazier, at least early on, had something to do with the Mona Bismarck Exhibit. Involving the actual exhibit, I was able to help the guest curator put up the photographs of Mona in the last room of the exhibit. He was very particular, and his assistant was even more than he was, but I helped hold the framed photos. It was neat being able to see things going up in such a calculated manner. The difference between the Founder’s Gallery Exhibit and Mona Bismarck, is that the Founder’s Gallery was laid virtually out and then printed out to be implemented by the collections technician and I. With the Mona Bismarck Exhibit, I was able to see the guest curator decide where things were going to be exactly while he was doing it.

This exhibit has been very stressful for the collections and exhibits team, especially since they had to hire an outside curator and many other people to help put it together. All of them had to come in on multiple weekends in a row and stay late. It really put into perspective how much the people at a museum, at least at the Frazier, have to put into making the deadlines. If the museum has been putting up fliers and creating ticketed events for an exhibit, there is no way that an exhibit can be postponed.

Isabella Glover

March 19, 2018

Today was my last day at the Frazier. My internship has ended at pretty much the perfect time. This is because Mona Bismarck was the last exhibit to be installed until August. This week everyone has been very exhausted because they’d been working so hard on the Founder’s Gallery and then Mona Bismarck for the past couple months. Since they were all so exhausted, and because I had expressed interest in it earlier, I was able to go meet with and shadow a lady in the marketing department. She showed me what marketing at a museum mostly entails and explained what her job was like. While it seemed fairly interesting, it made me miss collections and installing exhibits.

The Mona Bismarck opening night started after museum hours and guests had to purchase tickets to enter. It was catered and had two bars. Everyone was dressed very fancy and looked like they loved fashion or networking. That was the very first time I got to see the exhibit all put together, which was extremely exciting. It was awesome being able to see something that I had helped work on for months be completed. I also got to show my boyfriend the Founder’s Gallery and saw a lot of people looking at it. That was really neat for me because it was something that I really helped install a lot of, that I got to work more hands on with, and people looked very interested in it.

Today, me and the collections technician made mounts out of plexiglass. They were just for practice and I got to keep them to use as a cell phone holder. It was a fun project to do and a good way to end my internship. I also went out to lunch with both of my supervisors and talked about their careers and my future/potential career paths I may take. They both had quite a bit of insightful information for me. I think I am going to miss them once I am fully gone because it was a great experience and they gave me a lot of knowledge about so many things that I had never known about. It’s crazy to think that going into this internship, I did not even know what an accession number was. Now I know what it is and how to create one. I am glad that I did this internship.

Projects

Installing New Exhibits

The following pages are objects from the Founder’s Gallery Exhibit and the Mona Bismarck Exhibit. I aided in the installation, handling, condition report writing, mount making, or research of all of these objects. It is worth noting that all of the objects in the Founder’s Gallery are owned by the Frazier, while all of the objects in the Mona Bismarck Exhibit are loans.

**First Page**

The very first picture on this page is of a hair wreath. I helped place this object into the case. It is very notable because it is made of locks of human hair.

The second picture contains a rifle, a cane gun, and a revolver. I drilled the mounts into the wall for the cane gun and the revolver. I also placed both objects carefully into the exhibit.

**Second Page**

The first picture is a clearer image of the rifle, cane gun, and revolver. For each of these objects, I painted the mounts black to match the background.

The second picture is the violin, the violin mold, and the case. I drilled in almost all of the mounts for these objects and hung them. All of the objects from the first and second page are in the same case – the first case I helped install. The outline for how the objects were to be put into the case did not correctly account for the objects’ size. We had to figure out how to rearrange it so that it would all fit in the case coherently.

**Third Page**

The first picture is a different view of the violin.

The second picture is two suits of samurai armor. These were very exciting to put up because they are very delicate. These took four people – the curator, collections manager, collections technician, and I to put them together.

**Fourth Page**

This page is both of the Samurai suits of armor. They are from the late 1800s.

**Fifth Page**

These pictures are from the Jesse James case. I drilled the mounts into the case for some of these objects and mounted the objects. The second picture is a close-up of Jesse James’ gun.

**Sixth Page**

The first picture on this page is of a Buffalo Bill ticket. I helped make the mount for this object out of plexiglass. We cut, bent, and glued the plexiglass to make the mount.

The second picture is of the General Custer case. I helped mount these objects and helped measure the lighting for this case specifically. The lighting was very bright on these objects at first, so it took the longest to get the lighting correct.

**Seventh Page**

The first picture is from the entrance to the Mona Bismarck Exhibit. This is the timeline of her life, which I helped fact check.

The second picture is 18 of the 24 Roger Vivier shoes that I condition reported and entered into PastPerfect. Only 18 were put on display because the rest were too damaged by light and other factors.

**Eighth Page**

The first picture is a different view of the Roger Vivier shoes.

The second picture is some of the dresses of Mona Bismarck that I entered into PastPerfect. All of these dresses are extremely expensive designer dresses, most of them are Balenciaga.

**Ninth Page**

Both of these pictures are of the photos of Mona Bismarck and her dogs. I helped the guest curator and the collections technician put these photos up.

PastPerfect

The following pages are from the museum software database, PastPerfect. These pages show what I worked on. The first page, in particular, shows how many records I added. Out of everyone in the Collections department, I added the most, almost 50% of the records added into PastPerfect by those currently working in the department were done by me. The next few pages are of a condition report I wrote on Mona Bismarck’s chair. The last few pages are a report showing all of the entries I catalogued or added to during my time at the Frazier.

Resume and Cover Letter

Reflection Essay

Isabella Glover

ANTH 411

Frazier Museum Collections Internship

This semester I had the opportunity to work as an intern at the Frazier History Museum in downtown Louisville. I helped out in a couple different areas of the museum: collections and exhibits. I dealt with the objects in the collection storage, made mounts for the objects going on display, and helped install objects into the exhibits, among other projects. This internship gave me an incredible amount of insight into the ways museums work as well as the way I work in a professional setting.

Through my internship at the Frazier, I was able to fully understand how the exhibits and collections of a museum operate. I arrived at a very fortunate time, since there were four exhibits being taken down, and three being put up in my time there. I had to opportunity to aid in returning objects, which required me to learn about loan contracts and outgoing condition reports. I also experienced many objects coming into the museum for exhibits, as well as many objects being moved from the Frazier’s collections into exhibits.

During my first week at the museum, I was given gloves and papers on handling objects. It is extremely important to handle objects carefully, considering they are usually old, fragile, and sometimes the only objects of their kind existing – not to mention expensive. I had to read about handling objects and was shown by my supervisors the correct way to handle an object before I was allowed to do it myself. I also learned that since the objects are being preserved, there are certain temperature, light, and humidity levels that the objects need to be at, so they will not be damaged in any way. Not only did I learn about the actual handling of objects, but I also learned about the amount of paperwork involved in keeping the objects.

When dealing with objects in museum collections, it is extremely important to keep all of the paperwork regarding the objects together, especially on ones that are on loan from other institutions. If something were to happen to the object, for instance if it was misplaced or damaged while being shipped, there is great potential that the museum was lose its credibility or its ability to receive another loan from that institution, which would greatly damage the museum’s reputation. The database PastPerfect is extremely helpful in keeping track of all of these forms of paperwork, since you can scan it to the database. It also allows the user to input the location of the item, which is very important, especially if there is a personnel change and the one who moved or placed an object is no longer at the museum, then the item would not be lost. This had potential to be a major issue at the Frazier, considering they had quit using the database for a couple years and then had a major personnel change.

This internship helped me learn a lot about myself and the way that I work. I was unaware before my time at the Frazier that I am not necessarily a detail-oriented person. I work best if I am thinking about things in a more “big-picture” way. Much of museum work is extremely detail oriented. For instance, whenever an object is received or is being sent off by the museum, a condition report must be made on it. Condition reports have to be extremely detailed. It is important to note every single scratch, bit of dust, or anything that was not originally on the object when it was first made. Considering many objects in the Frazier are historical, they have had years of wear on them. A single condition report can take anywhere from ten minutes to an hour to complete, maybe even more.

Another thing I learned was that entering facts into a database is grueling work for me. I realized that I am definitely a problem solver and do not work well on doing repetitive tasks. I was able to shadow someone in the marketing department at the museum. This made me realize that I am interested in creating things and coming up with new ideas, instead of just mindlessly writing condition reports and working on maintaining a database. However, I did thoroughly enjoy making mounts and installing objects into the cases. I think if I had been able to do more curatorial work, such as planning out the cases, which objects to go in them, and where to put them, I would have been more interested in that.

There were a few things that surprised me about working at the Frazier. I found out that there is not much freedom to make decisions regarding exhibits unless you are the chief curator or the CEO of the museum. It is acceptable to make suggestions, but only on smaller things or if the objects are not fitting correctly in a case. Another thing that sort of surprised me was that each object’s position had to be very well thought out. When installing the Founder’s Gallery, we put up a rifle next to a picture of Teddy Roosevelt. The CEO saw this after it was done and had us change it because the gun was pointing at Teddy Roosevelt which she thought made it look like the gun was shooting him. I never would have thought of that when I saw it on display, but after the fact, I agreed that it did not look great to have a gun pointing at Teddy Roosevelt’s head.

Being an intern at the Frazier helped contribute to my practical learning and career goals. It gave me insight into how museum operate, notably in the exhibits, curatorial, and collections departments. I thoroughly enjoyed getting hands on experience working in a museum, rather than just taking a class and learning about it through reading. I feel that getting this hands on experience has made me understand careers in museums far better than I could have imagined. I had been interested in working in a museum since I first entered college and this internship gave me experience that was applicable. While I am uncertain if I will pursue a career in a museum in the future, I am certain that if I do, I will have valuable insight that would aid me in being an efficient and valuable employee.

This internship also helped me grasp a better understanding of my major, notably the more artifact-based side of anthropology. Many of my courses in my major have been archaeology and artifact based. Instead of merely reading about and looking at pictures of artifacts, I was able to actually deal with them hands-on. It gave me real, professional experience dealing with things I had previously discussed in class. If I had the opportunity to intern at another museum again, I would try to focus on doing more hands-on activities or just interning in a solely curatorial position. It would be more beneficial to me, I think, to know more about the curatorial aspects of museum work and not as much about the artifacts databases or condition reporting. I think it would also be beneficial if I were able to work on more solo projects. Most of what I did at the Frazier was with someone else. I did not do a ton on my own, although that could be expected since it was my first internship in that field.

Overall, this internship was an incredible opportunity for me to understand how museums work and how I work. The amount of insight I gained on working in collections and exhibits was far greater than any class I could have taken. My learning style is very hands-on and this internship enabled me to learn in the best way for me. Given what I learned at the Frazier, I am confident that I could get a job in a museum and be an efficient and helpful employee.