



A Practical Internship with the Morris Museum Geology Department



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Morris Museum:

The Morris Museum, located in Morristown, New Jersey, is a local museum that seeks to enhance cultural, scientific, and historic education through their permanent and temporary collections.

Throughout the summer the museum plays host to various camp groups and provides interactive exhibits to engage and excite children. During the school year, the Morris Museum is unique in its School Loan program, which puts together "boxed exhibits" for schools, libraries, and assisted living communities, making hand-on learning experiences fun and exciting.

For more information about the Morris Museum call 973-971-3700 or email info@morrismuseum.org.

Issues:

One of the major issues confronting the Morris Museum is that, while it seeks to engage and excite young audiences, many of the exhibits are outdated and could not be considered "kid friendly." Working as an intern under the Acting Curator of Geology, Mr. Dave Nalven, my main goal was to develop and implement a plan to make the Geology exhibits more interesting.

Activities:

In order to go about modifying the exhibits I first had to carefully review all the information that was presented in the various display cases in both the Geology and Paleontology Galleries.

During this I found that a number of specimens were mislabeled, and that the exhibits in general largely did not meet certain regulations regarding font sizes on labels and placement of specimens, such as radioactive rocks that were displayed at the front of poorly maintained display cases. Following these discoveries, I was also tasked with remedying these situations.

In order to complete my project, I created a new placard system which would both identify all the specimens on display as well as meet national museum regulations. I also created "fun fact" cards to include in the display cases of the Geology and Paleontology galleries, which made the exhibits more "kid friendly" and modern. Finally, I rearranged the Geology displays to ensure that potentially dangerous specimens (i.e., the radioactive rocks) were kept towards the back of the case, and maintenance was informed of the repairs that were necessary to the case.

At one point during my project I was faced with an unexpected opportunity. Camp groups often get a "behind the scenes" tour of the museum, and a stop in the Geology Lab is always particularly exciting. One day I was working in the lab, identifying and sorting bone fragments, when my supervisor informed me that I would be leading the Geology portion of the camp tour. This opportunity allowed me to work with the children, explaining what fields Geology encompasses and what activities we do in the Lab. The tour culminated with each child being allowed to pick a dinosaur bone fragment to take home, which I then had to identify for each child in the group! Although it was an unexpected event, I enjoyed working with the children and it gave me the opportunity to see the Museum's aims being successfully addressed.



Morris Museum Geology Lab

Lauren Earl

learl@umd.edu

College Park Scholars

Earth, Life, and Time Program

Department of Anthropology

University of Maryland, College Park

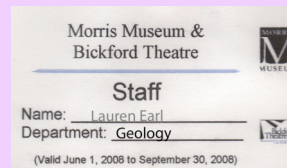


Photo courtesy of www.morrismuseum.org



Impact:

By completing my project I hope that the Morris Museum will become a more family-friendly place where parents and kids alike can enjoy all aspects of the exhibits. While the museum has been expanded over the years, the majority of the exhibits, and especially the Geology exhibits, have not been significantly updated for nearly a decade.

I was very lucky to have been working under Mr. Nalven as he was particularly patient with me, guiding my project and teaching me the skills one must have as a department curator. Under his guidance I learned how to properly care for and label specimens, how to prepare information cards for exhibits, and how to determine which specimens are "exhibit quality." I was also able to assist Mr. Nalven in specimen repair, piecing together a fossil echinoderm that had fallen due to water damage in the display case.

This project has further impacted my future career goals as it has opened my eyes to the world of museum curation, which I have now become more interested in, and has shown me that museum curation is about more than finding pretty new artifacts. Knowing now the time and resources that go into museum curation, and the skills one must have to successfully run a museum of even a small size, I see the potential opportunities I may have in the future as a result of this internship and the beneficial experiences I have had.

Future Work:

Having completed my project the Morris Museum is now on its way to becoming more modern and kid-friendly. Hopefully now that the Geology department has been updated other departments will be able to follow and update their departments accordingly, renewing the draw of the Morris Museum and restoring the excitement to cultural, scientific and historical education.

With the newly updated galleries the Museum is now better prepared to implement more school and camp programs for children and families alike, a goal the museum has long been looking to fulfill.

Acknowledgments:

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