

Pamela Pal - Internship experiences at the ROM and Markham Museum

I spent my summer doing two six-week internships – one at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Ontario and the other at the Markham Museum in Markham, Ontario. I knew coming into the Public History program that I wanted to put my previous teacher education degree to good use, so I chose to head in the direction of Educational and Public Programming at both sites.

These locations proved to be fantastic internship opportunities for me and my career goals. They were unique experiences, but with some sense of overlap because both involved working with the public and children. My projects were quite different at each, which helped me to gain more experience than I feel I could have at just one internship site.

At the Royal Ontario Museum, I shadowed numerous teachers in the Education Department and worked under the supervision of one of the museum's foremost authorities on Egypt and Egyptology, Gayle Gibson. Most of my time was spent with incoming school group assisting with their classes and labs. It was a great opportunity to handle artifacts, as well as communicate with the public – particularly children. I believe that my time there was most beneficial for the connections I made and people I met, who showed me the kinds of programs and opportunities available at such a large and well-known institution. I also assisted here with the editing and reviewing of the museum's newest tour, "The Iconic Tour" – which was interesting because I experienced what it is like behind-the-scenes getting a new program started and off the ground.

During my second placement at the Markham Museum, I was on the opposite side of the spectrum and spent very little time with the public. This, however, was great juxtaposition for my first block because I experienced what it is like to actually write museums programs – a rarity in larger institutions. The Markham Museum has a current overnight sleepover program in place for Girl Guides and Scouts of Canada, but it needed updating and to make better use of the museum's resources. I was brought in for this project and, in the end, wrote twelve distinct programs – three for each age level of the Girl Guides and three for the Cub Scouts of Scouts Canada – that visiting troupes could choose from.

What I found most rewarding about my time at the Markham Museum was that because it was a smaller institution, the chances for collaboration and cooperation with other staff members – even those from outside the Programs Department – was easier to come by. Though still a medium-sized – and thus fairly sizable – museum, the atmosphere made it easy to get right into work and feel comfortable.

Both sites solidified my thoughts about where I want to go with my career path and that programming is right for me. If I were to offer one piece of advice to incoming Public History students – make the most out of your internship block. Choosing more than one site is helpful because it gives you a taste for what is out there if you're not sure where you want to head, or, in my case, confirms that the path you chose is indeed right for you. Though I could have easily had a fantastic time at just one location, by splitting the block it increases your networking abilities and expands your experiences in a way that you might not be able to at just one site. It's something that's definitely worth considering and that I, personally, felt was immensely useful!