

Summer Internship Presentation

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Hi! I worked at the Sherman Museum from June and July, which is less than a block away from downtown. It is housed in the old Sherman Public Library, which was built with funds from the great steel baron Andrew Carnegie a little over a hundred years ago. Since I have an interest in local history and am from the area, I was excited for this opportunity.

I started work right when the museum was setting up for its annual summer dinosaur exhibit, so I helped to move around display cases, rearrange displays, and to set up new ones. Most of these were local dinosaurs such as *Acrocantaurus* and *Pawpawsaurus* (which has only been found in Fort Worth, by the way), but also included a 40-foot long replica of the T-rex Ivan. While positioning the exhibits, I helped to ensure that they were not only visually pleasing, but would also affect the visitor based on where they were positioned.

Once the exhibit opened up to the public, I would assist visitors by answering questions and helping to give tours, so I did a lot of research to keep me informed. I quickly learned to pick up cues on whether visitors would appreciate assistance, and when they wanted to explore the museum on their own. Sometimes I was asked questions like “Did you kill the dinosaurs?” by little children, but most of the questions I had were of a more serious nature.

One of my tasks to help keep younger visitors engaged was come up with a craft for them to do. I picked paper binoculars for the first few weeks as a fun way to encourage the children to explore the dinosaurs in the museum as if on a safari. Another activity I made for visitors of all ages was a scavenger hunt, where they would use clues to hunt down different fossils in the museum, winning a free pencil if they got all the answers right. I deliberately made the scavenger hunt to cover all areas of the museum, emphasizing spots that tended to be overlooked otherwise, like our high-perched pterosaur *Nyctosaurus*. Many visitors would spend half an hour or more trying to solve the clues, with some parents being more into it than the children!

My most important assignment was teaching Dino Academy, which was three days of classes on dinosaurs for six-to-twelve year olds. I started by choosing a different theme for each of the three days: Sea creatures, flying creatures, and land creatures. I researched different prehistoric animals, making sure to include the ones featured in the summer exhibit. All these facts I put together in a handout for the students, which also served as my lesson plans. To go with the theme of each day, I picked crafts like a 3-D plesiosaur to reinforce learning in a fun way.

Each day of Dino Academy started with a documentary on prehistoric animals to go with each day’s theme. Next, I led the children to the dinosaur dig, where I attempted to teach them some of the basics of paleontology by having them draw pictures of what they found and using brushes to uncover the fossil replica like real paleontologists. Then, I taught a short class while they snacked and made crafts before leading them on a private, behind-the-scenes tour of the exhibit. Since my students were a group of lively boys, I was worried that they did not learn much until I heard one who I thought had not paid much attention telling his mom very specific facts that I had taught that day.

One comment I kept hearing over and over while working at the museum was that people had no idea that it was there, even life-long Sherman residents 30 or more years old. Another thing that I noticed, based on the number of small children who visited the museum, is that there is a real demand in Grayson County for places people can go to entertain both their children and themselves, while learning a bit along the way. There were also quite a few visitors from surrounding counties, showing that there is a demand for cultural activities outside the Dallas Metropolitan area.

Overall, I enjoyed my internship at the Sherman Museum because it helped me to learn how to better engage people face to face, through creative design and placement of objects, and through activities that engaged the whole person. I want to thank the Center for Southwestern and Mexican Studies, as well as Austin College, for giving me such a wonderful opportunity.