Volunteer Experience at the Museum of Peoples and Cultures

Sadie J. Lee

Paul Stavast

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub

Part of the Anthropology Commons

The Annual Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference showcases some of the best student research from the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences. The mentored learning program encourages undergraduate students to participate in hands-on and practical research under the direction of a faculty member. Students create these posters as an aide in presenting the results of their research to the public, faculty, and their peers.

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub/158

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Family, Home, and Social Sciences at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in FHSS Mentored Research Conference by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
As BYU’s ‘teaching’ museum, the MPC provides a setting where BYU students can gain real museum experience. Under the mentorship of professional staff, museum class students and student employees are responsible for researching, developing, and installing exhibitions, processing and cataloging incoming and current collections, and organizing and cataloging excavation notes and other collection records.

Beyond classes and employment, the MPC also provides an oft-overlooked educational experience for student volunteers. Under the supervision of student employees, volunteers provide assistance in creating and distributing educational materials, cataloging collections, organizing records, and other tasks necessary for the daily maintenance of museum operations. I hypothesize that this involved approach provides a unique learning experience that can help student volunteers develop useful skills and discover educational and professional opportunities within their areas of interest.

BYU heavily encourages exposure to mentored, real-life work experience for students. As a result, many courses require students to volunteer as part of the coursework. The MPC is uniquely suited for giving students real experience in a professional setting outside the classroom when they are involved with the actual museum work under the mentorship of trained employees. In addition, volunteers receive information about museum classes and related careers. Internally for the MPC, it’s important to ensure the volunteer program provides a fulfilling experience for students because volunteering is the primary exposure to the museum for 69% of respondents. Volunteers who have a positive experience serving often go on to take museum classes and apply for paid museum positions.

**Introduction**

Volunteering at the Museum opened my eyes to the career possibilities of curatorial work which was something I had never considered before. “The information I’ve learned at the MPC has tied into several of my classes. Learning about different past cultures has helped me look at other traditions and beliefs of modern cultures in a new light. I think the MPC has helped broaden my mind.”

**Reasons for Volunteering**

- Class requirement
- Scholarship requirement
- Personal interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Volunteering</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class requirement</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship requirement</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal interest</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

- If teachers are going to require their students to volunteer, they should specify the learning objectives, especially if the class topic isn’t related to museum work or archaeology.
- Volunteer projects are dependent on current museum projects and the schedules of the supervising employees. The MPC volunteer program coordinator should explain to new volunteers how scheduling may restrict the projects available for them to work on. If they want to work on different projects, they may need to work during different timeframes and for a longer period of time (at least 20 total hours).
- The MPC employees should continue to emphasize explaining how the volunteer’s work contributes to a project, and how that project benefits the museum.
- Volunteering points students toward post-graduation career opportunities and aids students in obtaining campus employment pre-graduation.

**Experience with the MPC Before Volunteering (N=29)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never been to the MPC before, and never heard of it.</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heard of the MPC, but never attended.</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended at least one event (e.g., tour, etc.).</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended more than one event (e.g., tour, etc.).</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended as a class assignment.</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendations for Future Research:**

- How has volunteering been helpful for students in obtaining non-museum-related work?
- What restrictions do students have that prevent them from volunteering more if they wanted to?
- How much choice did students have in determining where they would volunteer, and how does that affect their learning experience?