

FL Museum of Natural History Internship: Summary
Michael Calkins

My internship experience at the Florida Museum of Natural History has been incredible. This is my last day “real” day working at the museum (they’re throwing an end-of-summer party tomorrow night) and I’m sad to leave.

My responsibilities were extremely varied. Over the course of the summer, I worked, independently, on creating and developing a lesson plan for a week-long summer camp class called “Nature’s Clean-Up Crew.” The museum gave me plenty of freedom in choosing how to interpret that title, what activities to include, which parts of the science of decomposition to focus on, etc. Each day, for five consecutive days, I taught for 4 hours, for a total of 20 hours that week. Let me just say: it was exhausting! The third and fourth graders I taught were active, rambunctious, and seemed to run on a never-ending supply of energy. I learned a lot about taking control of the classroom and using discipline as a tool to keep order; I also learned that having everything “in order” all the time is, well, impossible. I learned that I have to be more open to a little bit of chaos and spontaneity, and I learned to cope much better when things didn’t go *exactly* as I had planned. Overall, I think my teaching experience went wonderfully and the kids had a great time with the activities I had planned.

Another area I focused on was the junior volunteers, or JVs. Every summer, the museum hires about 120 JVs from middle and high schools in and around Gainesville (although one JV was from out of the county, and another from out of the *country!*). The JVs are assigned an “area” to work in, which include classroom assistants, exhibit docents, discovery cart attendants (discovery carts are actual carts that have information about fossils, butterflies, and owls; visitors come up to the carts and learn about one of the topics from a JV), and discovery room helpers. I was in charge of supervising and assisting the JVs working in the Amazing Butterflies exhibit and on the discovery carts. Since most JVs worked for a week or two in each area of the museum, I had new JVs every week. As I said, I was their supervisor, and as such, I made sure they understood what they were supposed to do and taught them how to do it effectively. I really enjoyed this part of my internship as well since it gave me an insight into teaching middle and high school students, which is my eventual goal.

The end-of-summer party is also something I worked extensively on. My supervisor, Julie, told me she wanted to have a party at the end of the summer to celebrate all the hard work the JVs had done over the summer, and mentioned an “Olympics event” she wanted me to take charge of. Basically, I helped develop and coordinate a series of games, or “Olympic events,” that the JVs will compete in, in teams. I had to create an event for each area the JVs can work in that represents what a JV would do in that area.

Overall, I loved my experience at the museum. I’ve learned so much about what it takes to be a teacher every day (and how much energy it takes!). I’ve learned how to better interact with adolescents and I have a better understanding of the way they think and process information. I’m going to be sad turning in my keys and name badge tomorrow, because this internship has been an experience I won’t soon forget. I’ve enjoyed working with everyone here at the museum—especially my students and volunteers. I really hope this internship is offered next summer because I would do it all over again in a heartbeat. Thanks for offering such a wonderful opportunity!