Getting Their Foot in the Door: Strategies for Mentoring and Working with High School and College-Age Volunteers, Interns, and Staff

Katia Christakis
Studio Art Program Coordinator
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Christina Errico
Coordinator, Informal Engineering & Computer Science Learning
Museum of Science, Boston
Who are you?
ICEBREAKERS!

In your tables, choose one (or more!) of the following questions to answer and share with your tablemates:

1. If you were an art material, what would you be and why?
2. If you could go to Mars, would you? Why or why not?
3. If you could hang out with any cartoon character, who would you choose and why?
4. Share a funny story!
Who are we?
Design Challenges
Museum of Science, Boston
Design Challenges Program Overview

● Facilitated activities:
  ○ Engineering Design Challenges
  ○ Computer Science Activities

● Hours:
  ○ 10:00am-12:00pm every day
  ○ 1:30pm-3:30pm weekend days

● Visitorship:
  ○ Open to all visitors!
  ○ 120 visitors per hour, 180,000 visitors per year
  ○ This past summer:
    ■ 252 activities, 40,804 visitors
How We Work With Youth: Staffing Breakdown

The EDW hosts youth and college interns, volunteers, and staff throughout the year, but sees an influx over the summer in particular (about 25-30 total).

- **Youth Volunteers (ages 14-18)**
  - 3.5 hrs/week in the school year; 7 hrs/week over the summer

- **Youth Interns (ages 14-18)**
  - Completed 50 hours of volunteering prior to their internship
  - Up to 21 hrs/week; generally over the summer

- **College Interns**
  - Up to 21 hrs/week over the summer or the school year

- **Part-time Program Assistants**
  - Completed a Youth Internship and considered staff; generally over the age of 15
  - Up to 21 hrs/week in the summer; generally 7 hrs/week during the school year
How Work With Youth: Youth Responsibilities

Youth Volunteers

- Facilitate engineering & computer science activities for Museum visitors.
- Become knowledgeable about best practices for facilitating these activities.
- Act as an ambassador for the Museum by welcoming visitors, answering questions, and providing excellent customer service.

Youth/College Interns & Staff

- All volunteer responsibilities, as well as...
- Assist in maintaining the EDW activity spaces and materials.
- Record and input visitor data information.
- As needed, assist in prototyping new activities.
- Act as a role model for youth and regular volunteers.
How We Work With Youth: Orientations & Trainings

Orientation

- 3-hour orientation with School & Youth Programs Department
  - Logistical information
  - Timesheets
  - HR paperwork
- 1-hour EDW-specific orientation
  - Icebreakers!
  - Policy handbook
  - Philosophy
  - Day-to-day operations

Trainings

- On-the-floor trainings
  - See one, try one, do one!
  - Try the activity as a visitor
  - Observe experienced staff
  - Be observed by a staff member
  - Set them free!
- Goals meetings
  - Early/mid internship and end
- School & Youth Programs weekly workshops
- EDW weekly Team Meetings
How We Work With Youth: Summer Youth & College Interns

School & Youth Programs

● 4 hours per week with other Summer Youth Interns
● 21st century/“soft” skills topics
  ○ Community Building & Financial Literacy
  ○ College & Career Readiness
  ○ Leadership & Communication
  ○ STEM-related field trips

EDW Team Meetings

● 45 minutes per week with all EDW interns (college & youth)
● Team-building games
● Setting group expectations
● Weekly group check-ins
● Museum-specific topics
  ○ Habits of Mind
  ○ Challenging Situations
  ○ Visitor Social Agendas
  ○ Universal Design for Learning & Accessibility
Studio Art Classes
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Studio Art Classes at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Program Overview

- Classes offered year round, any time the museum is open, to anyone ages 4 and above
- Media includes sculpture, drawing, painting, mixed media, printmaking, watercolor, acrylics, oil, figure drawing, figure painting, and more
- Summer tends to be our busiest season: last summer we welcomed 1857 kids/teens over the course of 10 weeks, ran 136 kids/teen classes

Summer Structure

- Morning (9:00-12:00) and Afternoon (1:00-4:00); Full-day teen intensive, 10:15-2:15.
- 12 students maximum, ratio of 1 teacher and 1 teaching assistant to 12 students
- **KIDS CLASSES** are divided by age (5-7, 6-8, 8-10, 9-11) and planned thematically
- **TEEN CLASSES** are divided by age (12-14 and 15-18) and are planned according to technique as well as concept - since we’ve noticed our classes attract more serious students who are considering an art degree
Working with our interns

- Teaching Assistants - 13-15 college level interns: generally interested in art education, teaching, museum education, general museum interest
- Two intensive orientation sessions, prior to start of classes
- Daily check-ins to share updates, debrief challenges, and problem solve (or just check in!) as a group
- Scheduled, required “check-ins” with administrative staff
- Instructors as mentors
- Weekly enrichment sessions with other museum departments
- Weekly self reflections
- End of Summer Reflection (we love data)
Intern Responsibilities

Day - to - day

- Supervising students during pick up and drop off
- Escorting students throughout the museum
- Assisting teachers in the classroom with student supervision
- Working with students one-on-one and facilitating student interactions, classroom dynamics
- Adjusting teaching and supervision techniques for each age group

Opportunities to Take On a Leadership Role

- Introducing the “Museum Manners” prior to gallery visits
- Leading a guided inquiry conversation in the galleries
- Working with a fellow teaching assistant to plan and implement a lesson
- Leading a lesson
Weekly Reflection Example

Intern TA’ing with the 8-10’s age group

What is one technique/strategy/method that you observed this week that you would like to use in the future?

This week, I noticed that Ashley did an excellent job at explaining projects and foreseeing possible questions before they were even asked. This was particularly noteworthy to me this week because I taught several lessons myself and found it challenging to predict all of the problems that may arise. Ashley helped me to consider how the age group might respond to particular mediums and assignments. When she explained projects to the students, she really considered her audience and touched upon possible concerns that they might have had. For example, she always made sure to explain the medium to them, including whether or not it would wash out of their clothing. This helped to prevent messes and reduce confusion in the classroom about the materials we were using.
What is one challenge that you observed and how did you or the instructor address it? Would you handle this challenge differently in the future?

One challenge that I faced this week was taking on more leadership in the classroom. Ashley was very collaborative with me and my co-intern and offered us several opportunities to lead our own lessons. I took on each chance to lead, which allowed me three separate instances to practice teaching and classroom management. I found that it was not always easy to get the attention of the class or demonstrate projects in a way that would limit confusion. Ashley helped me at these moments, asking for the students to listen in a calm and serious way and helping me to think through possible confusion before leading demonstrations. In the future, I will be sure to remember these techniques when leading lessons and demonstrations.
Weekly Reflection Example

What is one thing you observed this week that you want to know more about?

One thing that I observed this week that piqued my curiosity was how perceptive the 8-10-year-olds were of different artistic styles and movements. When Julia led the students in an excellent gallery discussion about cubism, I was so impressed with how well the students voiced the ways in which abstraction differs from traditional Western art we saw in the Americas wing. I would like to know more about how to gauge the extent to which I bring in more advanced concepts and ideas with different age groups and classes.

Any other thoughts or feedback?

Thank you so much for all of your help this summer! One part of the internship that I am so grateful for is all of the opportunities you have allowed to socialize and spend time with the other interns. It is so beneficial to be able to share challenges and also great moments during the day with interns. It has also been so interesting to meet interns from other departments at enrichment events and recent internship parties.
This internship has offered me much to think about as I consider a career in museum work. Not only did I gain experience as a Studio Art intern, I also learned about many other careers in museums that I will consider as I continue my studies as an undergraduate student.

It brought to life a lot of the ideas I had about what my career could be. It's not such an abstract concept to me anymore, I can visualize my career more clearly than I ever could before.

The MFA experience has opened up a lot of doors for me in figuring out what I do and do not want to do in the future! (thankfully) I think this internship fit my interests perfectly and now feel more confident continuing in my major as Art Ed.

As a recent graduate from Illustration, I am looking to understand what kind of full time jobs I would like to do in order to be financially stable while I start my career. Helping teach at the MFA made me feel like I had all of the skills to work in that kind of environment. Learning about other MFA careers as well has sparked some ideas for future jobs.

It enhanced my knowledge of all the different aspects that go into a museum and my mindfulness of all the different parts people play.

I was able to speak to many people regarding their careers, and got very honest and encouraging feedback.
What are our challenges?
Common Challenges

1. Navigating the line between being a mentor, a friend, and a supervisor.
2. Setting clear expectations and following up to make sure they are being met.
3. Finding the best way to support a youth intern, staff, or volunteer whose primary interest lies outside their primary responsibilities.
4. Supporting each individual intern, volunteer, and staff member when they are in large cohort of other interns/staff.
5. Ensuring that youth interns/staff/volunteers are doing meaningful and relevant work.

What are we missing? What challenges have you encountered working with interns/youth staff?
OK, go solve all our problems!
What did you find?
Final Tips!

1. Be genuine, and establish a welcoming and accepting environment.
2. Have clear, written job responsibilities and expectations at the beginning of the youth’s position and hold them to these expectations throughout their time with you.
3. Create a list of shared expectations and behaviors with your cohort of youth for how everyone will conduct themselves, and post them so all can see.
4. Make sure youth know who their direct supervisor is, and who they can go to for help.
5. Use positive language when addressing and evaluating youth.
6. Help your youth set goals for themselves and make sure they have the resources to achieve them.
7. Check in frequently, one-on-one if possible, with your youth (especially at the beginning and end of their time with you).
8. Listen! Make your youth feel heard.
9. Give positive feedback when youth are doing well, and constructive feedback rather than criticism when improvement is necessary.
10. Ask for feedback, and take it into consideration.
THANK YOU!

Christina Errico
cerrico@mos.org

Katia Christakis
kchristakis@mfa.org