

# Career Connections

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## Careers in Museums

### OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

Museum careers encompass a huge variety of fields and job descriptions. Hanover alumni have worked in art museums, science museums, historic homes, and even a museum of miniature houses. A large museum staff might include people to do original research and publishing, to design and build exhibits, to manage personnel, to solicit donations, to give presentations in public schools, to preserve the collections, to provide museum security, and to coordinate all these activities. Smaller museums depend on generalists who can do many of these things. Three broad categories give some order to the wide variety within the museum field: **administrators** (such as museum directors, volunteer coordinators, public relations officers, and fund raisers), **educators** (such as exhibit designers and education directors) and **scholar-specialists** (curators, registrars, and conservators).

This Career Connections program will help students clarify their interests and predispositions and to acquire the skills needed for museum work. There are many ways to prepare for working in museums, but the most useful thing an undergraduate can do to prepare for a career in museums is to work in a museum – through an internship or fellowship or through a paid or volunteer position.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Exploring Options

The first step in exploring any career path is to visit the Career Center on the Top floor of the Campus Center. The resources and staff there can help you to identify your skills and strengths and to see how those skills and strengths might serve you in museum work. It would also be helpful to do some online research. The American Association of Museums has a very useful website that you may want to take a look at: <http://www.aam-us/org>.

- You should consider requesting a self-assessment survey such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or the Campbell Interest and Skills Survey.
- You should plan on a follow-up visit to review the results of the self-assessment survey, and you might plan to spend another hour or so browsing in the Center's library. Time spent browsing the library and talking to the staff will introduce you to the wide variety of positions available in the museum world. Equally important, the Career Center staff can alert you to internship and fellowship possibilities.

Another important early step is speaking informally with people who are familiar with the kind of work you are considering. Certainly you should tell your academic advisor about your interests; he or she may have ideas or professional contacts specific to your major area of study. Other people on campus can also be helpful. There are a number of Hanover's faculty and staff that have worked in or with museums that would be beneficial for you to talk to; see the inside cover of this booklet for their contact information.

Career Center staff can connect you with alumni and others associated with the college who are willing to talk to students about museum work. The staff can also advise you about good questions to ask the

people you contact. Once you have decided what general category of museum work you would like to explore, you can shape your college experiences accordingly.

## **Academics**

While people do gravitate toward museums connected to their undergraduate major (history majors to history museums, biology majors to natural history museums, and so on), no museum job requires a specific major. Whatever museum position you are considering, choose a major that interests you. Note that each of the three categories of museum work described in this Career Connections program calls for a somewhat different combination of skills and experiences, none of which are exclusive to a particular major.

Most museum professionals have advanced degrees. Scholar-specialist positions (even entry-level ones) almost always require advanced degrees. In contrast, many museum administrators and educators take entry-level positions immediately after graduation, beginning graduate work only after some on-the-job experience. Expectations for entry-level positions vary geographically, though. If you know where you would like to work after graduating, researching job offers in that area can help you decide on the timing of your graduate work. Especially if you plan to do graduate work immediately after graduating, you should consult the Career Center or a Career Connections advisor about prerequisites for graduate programs that interest you.

Good communication skills are essential in all museum work, and anyone interested in museum careers should attend to the ways they can develop those skills through LADR courses, major courses, and electives. Keeping a portfolio to remind yourself and others of ways you have demonstrated good communication skills can be helpful when it comes time to apply for internships, fellowships, or paid positions.

### ***Museum Administrators***

If you are interested in managing a museum staff or in raising or managing money for museums, you should prepare for those positions much as you would prepare for any other business career. You should focus on undergraduate courses that will help you excel in communication, analysis, and planning. Courses in the humanities and social sciences help develop such strengths, especially when supplemented with participation in the Center for Business Preparation or with individual business courses (such as those in accounting, marketing, or management). If you find yourself with additional space in your schedule for electives, consider an education course or two (such as “Inquiry in Education”) because the educational function of museums is often central to museum administrators’ work. In all of your courses, look for opportunities to do group work and to hone your skills in oral and written communication. Many museum administrators have graduate degrees in fields such as arts administration; consulting the Career Center about those graduate programs can be helpful.

### ***Museum Educators***

Those who design, manage, or implement educational programs or exhibits should excel at communicating with children and with the general public. Any liberal arts major helps develop this ability, and there are a variety of courses that can supplement your major course work. Courses from the education department can be helpful; especially those that introduce you to broad philosophical issues or that explore education and child development (such as “Inquiry in Education”). To help you understand and communicate with museumgoers, consider courses in the communication department (in visual communication, cross-cultural communication, organizational communication, or gender in communication) and the psychology department (on human development and in sensation and perception). Finally, any art course that helps you develop skills in visual communication is useful. If you find yourself with additional space in your schedule for electives, consider a business course or two

(such as those in marketing or management) because museum administration and education overlap in many museums. In all of your courses, look for opportunities to teach colleagues and others (orally, visually, and in writing). Many museum educators have graduate degrees in education, design, or museum studies; consulting the Career Center about those graduate programs can be helpful.

### ***Museum Scholars and Specialists***

Those who do scholarship or conservation in a museum setting complete graduate degrees before beginning their professional life, and students interested in such careers should plan their Hanover course work accordingly. Museum positions devoted to scholarship are quite similar to faculty positions in universities. They often require terminal degrees (usually the Ph.D.), for example, and the pool of applicants for scholarly positions in museums is roughly the same as the pool of applicants for university research positions. Consequently, if you are interested in doing scholarship in a museum setting, you should use your Hanover course work to prepare for graduate school. Majoring in the discipline for which you plan to do graduate work is sensible, but majoring in a related field can also be helpful. In any case, consult with a professor in the field you expect to enter (and with the Career Center) to determine what graduate schools in your field expect. (For example, you may need language courses beyond Hanover's LADR requirement.) Scholars excel in written communication, in analysis, and in independent research. Any liberal arts course can help develop those strengths; courses in the field you expect to enter can help you learn that discipline's distinctive style of writing and thinking. You should also seek opportunities to excel with independent work (through research projects for any course, through directed studies, through independent studies, and through independent work outside of classes). Your senior independent study will be especially important because it will be evidence of your potential for professional-level scholarship (evidence that is useful for graduate school admission committees and for yourself as you chart your own future).

Museum positions devoted to conservation require additional technical training after graduation. Any liberal arts major can be helpful preparation for such work, but graduate programs in conservation often have specific undergraduate prerequisites (in studio art and chemistry, for instance). Visiting the Career Center to explore graduate programs that interest you will help you choose the undergraduate courses you need.

### **Co-Curricular Activities**

Many activities outside of the classroom can help you prepare for a career in museums. Perhaps the most useful extra-curricular activity is becoming an intelligent observer of the museum world. Off-campus programs often include opportunities to visit museums in other countries or regions, and Omnibus outings may include visits to museum closer to campus. Making note of your observations about the exhibits you see or of your conversations with staff members (and keeping those notes in your portfolio) can be helpful when it comes time to apply for internships, fellowships, or paid positions. You should also become a member of one or two museums that interest you. As a member, you will receive mailings and newsletters about those museums' educational programming and fund raising projects. You may also hear about internship possibilities or job openings in museums you support. Joining the American Association of Museums will keep you informed about job openings and issues of concern to museum professionals; attending AAM annual meetings can help you network with people who share your professional interests. For more information on the AAM, visit their website at: <http://www.aam-us.org>.

### ***Museum Administrators***

If you are interested in museum administration, you should look for opportunities to manage people, money, or ideas while you are still a student. Serving in student government or as an officer in a student organization can be a good way to develop management skills, for instance. The Student Programming Board also offers many management opportunities.

### **Museum Educators**

Those interested in working with exhibits and education programs should look for opportunities to educate others. Preparing public service or educational features for the *Triangle* or the student television channel is helpful preparation for museum work, for instance, as is work on the *Revonah* and serving (formally or informally) as historian for a student organization. Tutoring or coaching (fellow college students, local school children, or GED students) is also good experience for museum work. College Mentors for Kids (here at Hanover) and the adult literacy program at the Madison-Jefferson County Public Library are two programs you might join, for instance.

### **Museum Scholar-Specialists**

Those thinking of pursuing scholarship in museums should participate in clubs associated with their discipline, such as the History Club or Geology Club. You should also pursue opportunities for independent research, through the Intensive Inquiry program, for instance.

### **Work Experience**

Getting experience working in museums is probably the most important thing you can do to prepare yourself for a career in museums. Simply put, if you want a job in a museum after you graduate, work in a museum before you graduate – as a volunteer, in a formal internship program, or through a summer job. Virtually every museum has a volunteer program, and many hire extra staff in the summer. Grants (from the National Science Foundation, for example) are also available to support research internships in museums. The Career Center staff can help you find the position that is most useful for furthering your particular goals. Hanover students have done internships in many museum settings, some of which include The Indianapolis Museum of Art, Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, The Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, and The Indianapolis Children's Museum.

On-campus jobs can also help you prepare for a career in museums. Working with the alumni office or the development office can give you insight into fund-raising, cultivating patrons, and communicating an institutional vision to diverse constituencies. Working as a research assistant for a professor in your discipline can be invaluable preparation for graduate school. Serving as a Resident Assistant or Peer Advisor provides opportunities for planning programs and for educating fellow students (through visual and oral communication). Jobs at the Duggan Library can give you a taste of cataloging and collection management. Working at the Duggan Library Archives or in the Fine Arts Gallery can introduce you to preservation of art and texts. Helping with the slide collections housed in the art department and history department can also be useful preparation for the visual analysis and visual communication of museum work.

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