

Synthesize

WASHINGTON COLLEGE MAGAZINE
FALL 2018

Making it Real



Explore America

This summer, a record number of Washington College students held full-time paid internship positions at some of the nation's preeminent cultural institutions, thanks to the Starr Center's Explore America Summer Internships program.

By MARCIA C. LANDSKROENER M'02



THE LIST OF INTERNSHIP HOSTS READS like a *Who's Who* of the nation's top cultural institutions: the National Archives, the National Portrait Gallery, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, and George Washington's Mount Vernon, to name just a few.

Sponsored by the Starr Center for the Study of American Experience, Explore America internships are open to students from every department. This year's 17 recipients—including majors in art, chemistry, English, history, modern languages, international studies, political science, and sociology—were awarded grants of up to \$4,500 to deepen their understanding of American history and culture and gain off-campus experiences.

The program has a track record of converting internships into careers. The Center for Civil and Human Rights, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the Maryland State Archives, and Historic Jamestowne hired their Washington College interns. Other interns parlayed their experiences into jobs at related institutions, including the Conservation Lab at the Library of Congress, the National Constitution Center, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

"The Explore America Summer Internships give these students marvelous experiences and introduce them to mentors who sometimes change the course of their lives," says Adam Goodheart, the Starr Center's Hodson Trust-Griswold Director. "But it also does something that most liberal arts colleges don't: help students continue their intellectual journey into the world beyond campus. By offering recipients sufficient funding, we level the socio-economic playing field, since it's often only the children of wealthy parents who can afford to take the prestigious—but almost always unpaid—summer internships that give college graduates a boost into their professional careers."

The internships began more than a decade ago with a series of gifts from Drs. Thomas and Virginia Collier, longtime friends of the College, to establish what were then known as the Comegys Bight Fellowships. (The name derived from the Colliers' 250-year-old historic house near Chestertown.) It has grown by leaps and bounds thanks to the generosity of both the Colliers and other donors. Recent gifts from friends of the Starr Center—Jane Nevins and Drs. Jack and Jennifer London, featured in recent issues of this magazine—have laid the first foundations of an endowment for the Explore America program.

We offer here a few stories from this year's class of Explore America interns.



Simon Belcher '18

History and Chemistry Major

George Washington's Mount Vernon: Founding Fathers Fellowship

A DOUBLE MAJOR IN HISTORY AND CHEMISTRY MADE PERFECT SENSE FOR SIMON Belcher '18. Historical narratives that transport readers to other places and times, and the physical objects that have survived the span of centuries were equally powerful forces that propelled him into a master's program in materials science and a career in heritage conservation.

"I've been interested in history since I was a little kid," Belcher says, "and it comes from my interest in fantasy fiction stories. I would read and go off to other worlds and go on adventures. I associated that strongly with history—I look at history as story. And that's why objects are so cool. It's no longer just a story, it becomes real. To think that this object existed back then! It's like pulling the Excalibur from the pages of the book. That's kind of extraordinary. That's where my interest in objects comes from."

At the University of Arizona, where he is involved in the Heritage Conservation program, Belcher is focused on the analysis of historical artifacts from a scientific point of view.

"By looking at the structure of objects you can determine how they were made and when they were made," Belcher says. "Then you have to understand them in context of other things. You look at them in a historical context. I was excited to be doing that as a Founding Fathers Fellow at Mount Vernon. My internship there allowed me to use objects for a practical purpose—to convey information about a particular moment in time, and how these objects fit into a series of events."

Belcher points to his favorite historical object, Braddock's Sash, as an example. This bit of red silk cloth—a gift from Braddock's father and the mark of a commanding British officer—embellishes our understanding of early American history. The story of the sash begins when Washington was a young soldier aspiring to a British commission.

"Braddock led the British expedition in the Battle of Monongahela during the French & Indian War, and his campaign was crushed," Belcher recalls. "Braddock was mortally wounded and was carried off the field in his sash. George Washington, who rallied Braddock's men in retreat, ended up with the sash, which he wore when his portrait was painted for the first time."

As Belcher says, the sash was there at a pivotal moment in history. It helps us understand the political climate of the region, and the societal and military hierarchy of the times. Even the physical characteristics of the sash—an expensive, strong, and elastic silk fabric that could be used as a stretcher—are important.

"With this one object you get the intertwining of all these themes and topics of conversation," Belcher says. "The object exists throughout time. It had a certain context at one point, but a different meaning that changed over time. Historical artifacts like this change temporally and spatially, and they are useful vehicles for telling a richer story."



Sara Underwood '19

History Major, Anthropology Minor

Hodson Trust Scholar

Museum of the American Revolution: Founding Fathers Fellowship

IT WAS A FRESHMAN CLASS THAT SPARKED SARA UNDERWOOD'S passion for American history.

"My intro class with Professor [Ken] Miller first semester made me realize that history is so much more than just facts and dates," recalls Underwood '19, a Hodson Trust scholar now intent on a career in museum curation.

That initial spark, fanned under the mentorship of faculty and staff at the Starr Center, has spurred a new partnership for Washington College with Philadelphia's Museum of the American Revolution (MAR). As a Founding Fathers Fellow, Underwood landed a post as the only full-time curatorial and collections management intern at the new museum, which tells the story of the War for Independence through high-tech, interactive exhibits.

"The first time I stepped into the museum, I was in awe," she says. "They use touch screens to help tell a deeper story about artifacts and the people, and the gallery design and interactive exhibits are incredibly impressive. I got to see what curators do and what goes into making a museum run."

Underwood's projects included researching the rise of Loyalist units in Philadelphia, tracking George Washington's movements, and conducting research on the George and Martha Washington presidential levees.

"My favorite project was assisting with the installation for Flag Day, which included Washington's standard flag and a replica that went into orbit in 1998," she says.

Gaviota Hernandez Quinones '21

Political Science and Sociology Major, Gender Studies Minor

National Museum of American History

6 HOW DO YOU CELEBRATE THE FOURTH OF JULY?

"Why do you vote, or not vote?"

"Do you participate in social protest? And if so, why?"

"How would you change the world?"

These are just some of the questions that Gaviota Hernandez Quinones '21 asked visitors who came to the National Museum of American History, where she spent the summer as a research intern. Focused largely on topics of immigration and the resistance movement of the late 1800s in support of a national curricular project known as Becoming US, Hernandez also had the opportunity to work in different areas of the museum, help develop tours and activities, and engage with visitors of all ages.

Among her primary responsibilities were developing lesson plans and creating object-based class discussion prompts that help young learners frame modern political movements within a historical context. As she researched political histories—such as that of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s—and the artifacts that remain, Hernandez understood that her work would impact the next generation of Americans.

"One of the most moving things for me was attending a citizenship ceremony on the Fourth of July," says Hernandez, a transfer student from the University of Puerto Rico. "The internship was also a great opportunity to engage in political history and learn what academic research really entails. This experience gave me a push to get involved and to network with professionals in the field."

One of those professionals invited Hernandez to apply for an internship next summer, at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.





Photo by Jessica McFadden

Maria Betancur '20

History and French Studies Major, Mathematics Minor
Hodson Trust Scholar
Smithsonian American Art Museum

GOING INTO HER SUMMER INTERNSHIP, MARIA BETANCUR '20 knew a lot about French art, but little about American art. That all changed through her experience at the Smithsonian's Luce Foundation Center for American Art, where she not only mastered new subject matter but gained the confidence to conceive of new possibilities for a future in museum work.

"When I started college, I had in my head I wanted to work in a museum, and I thought about becoming a curator," says Betancur, a Hodson Trust scholar who chose Washington College specifically for its programs in history. "This internship informed me of the vast opportunities in the museum world. There are so many other things I could do. Now I want to do public programming and education."

Betancur also appreciated the autonomy she was given to shape her internship experience.

"I was able to create my own projects and decide what experiences and skills I could home in on," she says. "I could run with whatever I wanted."

In her case, she led sketching groups, helped out with the concert series, and—best part—created her own 30-minute tour about three lesser-known 19th-century artists. She chose to examine the work of Kenneth M. Adams, Elbridge Ayer Burbank, and Joseph Sharp, each of whom depicted Native Americans in a more authentic way than did their contemporaries. She also helped draft text for 16 exhibition labels.

"There was a lot of research and a lot of writing, which definitely helps with the thesis looming."

Betancur's senior capstone will focus on the German occupation of France in World War II.

All 17 Explore America internships were funded by generous supporters of the Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience. If you would like to help fund the Explore America program, please call Adam Goodheart at the Starr Center, 410-810-7166, or Emily-Kate Smith in College Advancement, 410-778-7715.

Elizabeth Cassibry '20

History and German Studies Major
Computer Science and European Studies Minor
Maryland State Archives: London-Scott Family Fellowship

FOR A SELF-DESCRIBED EARLY AMERICAN HISTORY NERD LIKE Elizabeth Cassibry '20, college doesn't get much better than hanging out at the College's Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience, unless you count those 10 weeks spent conducting primary research to reconstruct the lives of fascinating figures from the past.

As a London-Scott Family Fellow at the Maryland State Archives in Annapolis, Cassibry contributed dozens of biographies to the Maryland 400 Project, which is bringing to light the heroic efforts of Maryland soldiers in the pivotal Battle of Brooklyn. Were it not for those men stalling two waves of British soldiers on Aug. 27, 1776, the Revolutionary War might have been over before it really began.

"The British were supposed to trample over the Continental Army," says Cassibry. "But these Maryland soldiers prevented that from happening. Without them, George Washington would not have been able to retreat. The fact that this was such a big event in the American Revolution and that so few people know about it makes this really exciting."

Cassibry, who came to Washington College as a Quill & Compass Scholar, studied wills, probate records, marriage records, and other primary sources to learn what happened to the men who saved George Washington's army. She wrote as many as five biographies a week under the tutelage of her adviser, a careful editor.

"Before the internship, I would have described myself as a mediocre writer. Now I'm a much better writer. I have an easier time conveying my thoughts. And I learned to accept criticism and apply it to my writing."

She's looking forward to stretching those writing skills when she tackles her senior capstone project, an in-depth study of Tobias Stansbury, a cadet in the Maryland 400 who later became an important figure in Maryland politics.

