

## Alternative Spring Break 2018 Reflections

**Amanda Neace**

**Institution:** Smithsonian Libraries

**Project:** Education

I had been anticipating the alternative spring break program to work for a week at the Smithsonian for years - since before I was even actually enrolled at UK. When I applied, I knew that this was an experience that I wanted to have. I was thrilled when I was selected to work on the education project this year. My goal was to make the most of my week in Washington, and I wanted to take advantage of every opportunity I was given there. My background in children's programming at both museums and libraries, as well as the education I've received at UK were extremely helpful in preparation for the assignment I was given.

The project I worked on involved creating "museums in a box." I was really interested to learn that the Smithsonian Libraries had only recently created a new position to specifically work on education. The Education Specialist, Sara Cardello, is working with a company in London to make the scholarly resources of the Smithsonian Libraries more accessible and relatable to children. These museums in a box contain an audio machine that is powered by raspberry pi. The machines play audio from 10 postcards with artwork and resources found in the Smithsonian, as well as one 3D printed object that goes along with the box theme. All children have to do to play the audio is simply set the postcard or object on top of the machine. These boxes will be sent to classrooms in DC and across the country.

I worked on creating scripts for the 3D objects of eight boxes. These museums dealt with narratives of Asian/Pacific American experiences and STEM subjects. My topics ranged from the history of the compass to how a croissant reminded a Vietnamese immigrant of her home country. Perhaps my favorite script involved a rhino meeting a zoologist for the first time and learning about what their job is about. These scripts were playful and will be fun for children to listen to, but they also taught lessons that were valuable to the theme.

I had the opportunity to collaborate and receive notes and revise my scripts with the Education Specialist, her full time intern, and representatives from this company in London who are creating the museums. I have been employed at a very small, rural library for nearly five years, and the opportunity to collaborate and work as a team isn't common there because the staff is so small. So even the chance to work together in such a larger environment was a fascinating experience. I enjoyed the opportunity to write and share educational ideas in a creative manner. These are skills that I relished the opportunity to refine at such a renowned institution.

During my program, the intern coordinator Erin Rushing also gave us the opportunity to participate in three tours. These behind the scenes experiences allowed us to talk with people who work in the Cullman Library, the Freer Sackler Library, and the digitization team. We

## Alternative Spring Break 2018 Reflections

learned about the history of bookbinding at the Cullman, the unique responsibilities of librarians who handle resources in diverse languages at the Freer Sackler, and how the digitization process takes place. These were incredible opportunities and learning experiences that I would have never gotten to participate in without the alternative spring break program.

There is so much that I could say about this week. I feel like the greatest impact that this experience has had on me is the idea that my degree can be used in so many different ways. I've worked in a very narrow aspect of librarianship for several years, but my degree has prepared me for a diverse range of positions in libraries. After completing the alternative spring break program, I feel extremely confident in my education and experiences.

## Alternative Spring Break 2018 Reflections

### **Amy Curtis**

**Institution:** National Library of Medicine

**Project:** Genetics Home Reference

I had an amazing experience working at the National Library of Medicine for ASB 2018! I had no idea previously how immense NLM and NIH really are, and hadn't thought of the diversity and wide range of employee positions necessary to maintain such massive institutions. I was impressed with how helpful and welcoming my supervisors were. Before arriving, I had a set weekly schedule of meetings and lunches with various people with some free time to complete research. Within ten minutes of arriving, my direct supervisor on the Genetics team, Stephanie Morrison, noted my undergrad interest in media arts and set up an additional meeting for me with a graphic designer and medical illustrator. This led to extra activities for me to include attending a green screen shoot to set up shots for an upcoming video project, and meeting with a member of the Medical Arts Branch in the main building of NIH to overview some of their duties. I was fascinated to see some of the work that they produce, and to learn that a lot of their team members are not only remarkable artists, but also have nearly MD level scientific backgrounds. Everyone that I interacted with was excited to teach me about their roles and responsibilities, even though I know that they're very busy people. Kathel Dunn took the time to go over my Resume with me, and not only propose changes, but explain her reasoning behind each alteration.

My main project was to research direct-to-consumer genetic testing companies and present my findings to the Genetics Home Reference team at the end of the week. I had very little prior knowledge about these companies, beyond commercials that I have seen. It was so interesting to delve into what these companies are purporting to reveal versus what their tests really mean for an individual in the proper context once I started looking at these companies and reading the fine print on some of the terms and conditions and privacy statements. I got an overview of the Genetics Home Reference team's website and what they have been working on, and was given the task to first compile a list of companies that do genetic testing, to look at sample reports and determine the type of information that people are receiving, and determining where there is overlap in testing between companies, noting unique tests provided. I also developed related questions that I would have as a consumer, either for clarification on certain points or related topics of interest that the Geneticists may not have come up with.

I was also grateful to be seated near the Associate Fellows, who were all very friendly and interesting to talk to about projects that they've been assigned to. We got to tour the NLM building and the main NIH Clinical Center, which was amazing. We were able to attend a Consumer Health Meeting and see collaboration in action. This opportunity proved to be so much more than what I thought it would be. I feel like it was professionally and personally beneficial in so many different ways, the week flew by, and I had an amazing time!

## Alternative Spring Break 2018 Reflections

### **JD Carruthers**

**Institution:** Smithsonian Libraries

**Project:** Advancement

The Alternative Spring Break Experience began at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History with an orientation facilitated by Erin Rushing. Then my supervisor, Allie Swislocki, took me to my assigned office, which was a temporarily unoccupied director's office with a first-floor window facing out onto Constitution Avenue.

My research assignment was to develop a list of potential donors for two special exhibits, "Game Change" and "Magnificent Obsessions" that Smithsonian Libraries Advancement was currently working on funding as part of the Smithsonian Libraries Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration this year.

"Game Change" will be an exhibition at the Natural History Museum opening in October of 2018, and according to the prospectus, "tells the story of a century-long relationship between humans and elephants. By juxtaposing the stories of famous big game hunters like Teddy Roosevelt and Carl Akeley against more modern conservationists like Russel Train, the exhibit shows how attitudes around wildlife conservation changed over the 19th and 20th centuries."

"Magnificent Obsessions: Loving Books, Advancing Knowledge" will be an exhibition at the National Museum of American History beginning in November, and "explores the power of collecting to preserve the past, further our understanding of the world, and advance knowledge. The exhibit showcases rare and unusual treasures from Smithsonian Libraries and highlights the pioneering collectors whose passion and curiosity shaped the collections. The objects featured celebrate the diversity and groundbreaking scientific works to contemporary artists' books."

For additional context in my research assignment, I was given Smithsonian directive 809 entitled "Philanthropic Financial Support."

My research strategy began with a review of literature on developing prospect lists for charitable causes. One informative article at [www.strengtheningnonprofits.org](http://www.strengtheningnonprofits.org) spoke of targeting the right people with the ABC approach, which stands for ability, belief and contact. A prospect needs to be able to pay for a donation; must believe in the cause for the donation, and must be available for communications or contact.

I identified prospects with a demonstrated affinity for the subjects of elephant conservation and bibliophilia through sites such as The Fellowship of American Bibliophilic Societies, which is a meta-organization composed of local bibliophilic societies, and The Elephant Sanctuary of

## Alternative Spring Break 2018 Reflections

Tennessee. Additional sources I located included [Philanthropy.com](http://Philanthropy.com) and [LooktotheStars.org](http://LooktotheStars.org). I composed a list of about one hundred potential donors for each exhibit.

Our group of interns attended the social media committee meeting where I learned about the strategic use of social media and metrics for evaluating institutional social media programs. The number of followers is one measure of evaluating effectiveness, but engagement is a better measure. This includes the number of “likes” a site gains collectively, as well as comments and shares.

Our group of internship colleagues also participated in a tour of the Cullman Library, which is a special collections unit of the Smithsonian Libraries including rare books on anthropology and natural science. We had the opportunity to see some very old and rare books and handle them, including a 16th century edition of Pliny the Elder’s treatise on natural history. This book had been printed in Latin using a Gutenberg type press, and featured multiple annotations throughout the text in manuscript form inscribed by at least ten different scholars, likely over several centuries. We also had the opportunity to visit the vault for the Cullman Library, which houses James Smithson’s original collection of library books, and David Livingstone’s shotgun.

Other tours our group took included the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Library, devoted to Asian art, and the digitization suite at the Cullman Library.

On my off time in Washington, I visited Arlington Cemetery, the National Cathedral, the National Museum of the American Indian, The National Museum of American History, the Smithsonian Castle, the National Portrait Gallery, International Spy Museum, the Washington Monument, the World War Two Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the Hirshhorn Museum, the National Gallery of Art, as well as a half-dozen ethnic restaurants in the DuPont Circle neighborhood.

On Friday our hosts treated us to lunch at the Gordon Biersch Brewery Restaurant. I want to express many thanks to Allie, Erin and everyone at Smithsonian Libraries for their kindness and hospitality during our internship.

## Alternative Spring Break 2018 Reflections

### **Lauren Colburn**

**Institution:** Smithsonian Libraries

**Project:** Public Relations & Marketing

I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity I had to work at the Smithsonian Libraries for UK's Alternative Spring Break program. I worked in the Director's Office under the supervision of Liz O'Brien, the Public Affairs Manager. Liz handles marketing and public relations for the Libraries and my task for the week was to create a marketing and outreach plan for two upcoming exhibits – Game Change and Magnificent Obsessions.

Game Change is an exhibit that will be featured at the Natural History Museum and will highlight the changing mindsets about elephants over time as they have gone from being animals of prey to animals of preservation. The Magnificent Obsessions exhibit will be featured at the American History Museum and is a celebration of the 50th year of the Smithsonian Libraries being one unified system. This exhibit will highlight various collections from the Libraries that offer insight not only about the collectors who donated these objects, but also the ways in which these collections contribute to our understanding of the world we live in.

Working on this marketing and outreach plan allowed me to apply principles I had learned in core and elective classes to a real-world project. For example, last semester I took LIS 690: Social Media. That class was instrumental to me during my Smithsonian experience as I was able to clearly think through different outreach methods for various social media platforms instead of trying to homogenize everything. One of my main takeaways though was how the libraries support the overall research needs of the various Smithsonian museums. During our tours of the Cullman Library of Natural History and the Freer Sackler Gallery Library, we were able to hear from librarians about the needs that they meet for their researchers. Whether it was tracking down the name of a species or providing a researcher with Asian texts, it became clear that the libraries play a big role in the overall mission of the Museums.

Additionally, thanks to Liz, I was able to meet with the Head Reference Librarian at the American History Library, Trina Brown. This was an incredible experience that I was not expecting (as I was stationed in the Public Relations division), but that greatly impacted me both professionally and personally. Meeting with Trina reminded me that librarians have a variety of skills that they daily get to use when serving their patrons. Hearing about the work that Trina does to assist researchers and the relationships she is able to foster with them gave me a renewed excitement for librarianship as I look to graduation in May.

Lastly, it was exciting to see the passion every staff member exuded for their work. Although we were only there for the week, everyone went above and beyond to answer our questions, give us an incredible experience, and make us feel welcomed. Thank you to UK and the Smithsonian

## Alternative Spring Break 2018 Reflections

Libraries staff for an experience that was rewarding on a number of levels and that I will not soon forget!

**Alex O'Keefe**

**Institution:** Smithsonian Libraries

**Project:** Research Services, Art

During the 2018 Spring Break I had the privilege of being chosen to intern at the Smithsonian American Art and Portrait Gallery Library (AAPG). I worked with Anne Evenhaugen, head librarian at the AAPG. My project was to work with a set of artists' book that required research, pre-cataloging, photographing, and image filing. In addition to this project, I was fortunate enough to receive tours of various Smithsonian libraries, assist with a reference inquiry, sit in on a meeting, and discuss more about the greater Smithsonian Libraries system.

For my primary project, I was given a set of over 30 books that were either recent gifts or pulled from other locations to determine if they should be reclassified as artists' books. If a book did not obviously fit into the category of artists' book, research was conducted to determine how other credible institutions categorized that book. If it was still not clearly an artists' book, research could go into the author/artist, the publisher, or the book itself. Once a book was determined to be an artists' book, it was looked up in the Smithsonian OPAC to see if it already had a bib number assigned. If it did not, I was tasked with doing quick, pre-cataloging with MARC formatting to initiate that books' processing.

Once the research and pre-cataloging was complete, I was shown the rare books storage area and tasked with selecting more books to photograph. In my exploration of their collection, I located an exhibition catalog in German that we researched further to decide if it had been mis-categorized. We determined that it was, in fact, an exhibition catalog; while it was an architecturally unique book, it was not an artists' book. This anecdote is not of major consequence to my project's outcomes, but I reference it to show the impact of the experience. Before my internship experience, I wouldn't have given it a second thought. After a few days of research and pre-cataloging, I had a deeper understanding of artists' books thanks to this project. This provided me the insight needed to recognize that this book was trickier to categorize than it seemed at first glance.

My final day was spent photographing over 50 artists' books to be used in their online access point to all Smithsonian Libraries' artists' books. These images were downloaded from the camera and relabeled with a uniform naming convention using either bib or catalog numbers and creator information. While the week was short, my experience was extraordinarily valuable. Everyone was welcoming to us and open to discussing their path to librarianship more, which was very helpful for someone on the verge of graduation. While I focused on one project, Anne

## Alternative Spring Break 2018 Reflections

made a point to offer opportunities to observe or participate in other functions of the library. These experiences coupled with the work I did with artists' books were the outcomes I had hoped for, and have already strengthened the skills I am using in coursework and interviews.



## Alternative Spring Break 2018 Reflections

**Sarah Hazelmyer**

**Institution:** Smithsonian Libraries

**Project:** Research Services, Natural History

When I was alerted to the fact that I had been chosen to study for a week at the Smithsonian, I was equal parts overjoyed and nervous. I had no idea what to expect or who I would meet. I had an inkling of the types of things I would see, but nothing on which to base my assumptions. I had the smallest of ideas of the kind of work I would be doing but was not privy to specifics. As someone who likes to plan, to dwell on details, and to plan some more, this lack of particulars set my mind racing as to the possibilities that awaited me. When asked by my friends, family, and coworkers what exactly I would be getting up to, I could only shrug, grin, and say, “I’m not entirely sure, but I know it’s going to be great!” Studying at the Smithsonian, even for the small amount of time that I was there, far surmounted any ideas I could manifest on my own.

When I boarded the plane that would carry me to my first visit to our nation’s capital, I was quieted by the overwhelming expectation of it all. I had never done anything like this—never travelled to another area of the country to further my education and gain professional experience. For me, this trip was very much about breaking out of my comfort zone. Determined to keep this in mind, I made it my mission to make the most out of this experience by immersing myself in my surroundings and by asking as many questions as I could. Luckily, I was assigned to the Natural History Library where the wonderful librarians on staff welcomed me with enthusiasm and copious amounts of professional advice and time-tested wisdom.

With respect to my individual assignment—I value the insider knowledge I gained about the current and prospective state of the reference collection at the Natural History Library. It is a common misconception that a great institution like the Smithsonian is a lifelong repository for artifacts related to our understanding of the world. For multiple reasons, this ideal is not able to become reality. Weeding the reference collection at the Natural History Library is an important task that must be completed every so often. While this weeding may not happen as frequently as it would at a public or academic library, weeding must occur to keep the body of available research current, relevant, and usable. I am proud to say that I had a small hand in devising a spreadsheet that would help streamline the process for the librarians and volunteers who would ultimately make the decisions on what stays on the shelf, what goes to storage, and what goes away altogether.

While I enjoyed the project aspect of my time at the Natural History Library, what I think I benefited the most from was the conversations I was allowed and encouraged to have with the librarians, curators, and scholars with whom I came into contact. Learning about their professional backgrounds and career aspirations allowed me to form a more complete picture of just how eclectic and nuanced a career in librarianship truly can be.

## Alternative Spring Break 2018 Reflections

In the end, I left the halls of the Smithsonian's Natural History Museum and the streets of Washington, D.C. completely exhausted. Exhausted because of the sheer amount of information I was exposed to and the things I got to see and experience. Never in my life have I experienced something that was so attuned to my personal inclinations. Surrounded by individuals who love the idea of learning and find value and meaning in the words and artifacts left behind by other humans is something that speaks to me on the deepest level. This trip is one I won't soon forget.

## Alternative Spring Break 2018 Reflections

**Cindy Butor**

**Institution:** National Library of Medicine

**Project:** Outreach

Since entering the MSLS program, I have been able to participate in the Alternative Spring Break program twice. Last year, I had the privilege of working at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum Library, an experience I absolutely loved. My colleagues were so helpful and enthusiastic, and they encouraged me to explore the DC area and what the Smithsonian museums had to offer. It was a transformational experience that encouraged me to think about government librarianship, which I have since pursued in coursework.

Working at the National Library of Medicine (NLM) offered a different but no less impactful experience. While my time at the Smithsonian allowed me to generally learn about government librarianship and what librarians at the Smithsonian do, working at NLM offered a more immersive experience. My direct supervisor Amanda Wilson, the Head of the National Network Coordinating Office, allowed me to lead or work solo on several important projects, including creating branding for the department, working with a producer to create several short videos for an upcoming conference, and creating a fact sheet that would be sent to Congress. She was also kind and generous, speaking to me frankly about government librarianship and offering insights into possible career goals and how to navigate ethical or professional issues.

In addition, I met several other individuals who were kind enough to answer my questions about librarianship and related fields. Kathel Dunn, the coordinator for the ASB program, organized several interesting tours of nearby facilities and helped improve my resume. Nicole, Gabrielle, and Shannon, Associate Fellows, showed me what life as a Fellow was like and how to apply for the position. Anne Altemus, the Acting Chief of the Audiovisual Program Development Branch, told me about her career path and how to merge my writing and graphic design experience with librarianship, as did Public Affairs Specialist Mary Ann Leonard. Everyone I met was kind and enthusiastic and sincerely interested in helping me begin my career as a librarian.

During my week at the National Library of Medicine, I felt reinvigorated and more enthusiastic about librarianship. While I have learned a lot in the program and my time as the Book Van Coordinator at the Lexington Public Library, being both a full time student and a full time library employee has been especially taxing this past year, due in no small part to some health issues. Interning at the NLM was exactly what I needed to remind myself why I love librarianship, why I am pursuing this MSLS, and why library workers are amazing individuals. I am sincerely grateful to both the University of Kentucky School of Information Science and the National Library of Medicine for allowing me to experience this, and I can't wait to pursue my own library career.