School of Environment and Natural Resources

Phipps Conservatory Science Education Internship

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Background
Over this past summer I worked for Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, located in Pittsburgh, PA. I worked within the Science Education department, and more specifically with the Discovery Program. The mission statement of Phipps Conservatory is “To inspire and educate all with the beauty and importance of plants; to advance sustainability and promote human and environmental well-being through action and research; and to celebrate its historic glasshouse.”

The Phipps Conservatory campus covers 15 acres and includes, but is not limited to:

- The 14-room historic glasshouse
- The Center for Sustainable Landscapes (CSL)
- The Exhibit Staging Center (ESC)
- The Nature Lab

The CSL and ESC are both LEED Platinum certified, and they both met the standards of the Living Building Challenge!

I found and applied to my internship through the Phipps website. I had just been curious and decided to look since it was a place I loved to visit as a kid.

After two interviews, background checks, and obtaining my certifications to work with children I had been offered the internship. Overall, the process was very straight forward.

On the Job
My time at Phipps was spent working within the Discovery Program, which is a program designed to provide children activities and lessons to connect with nature when they visit the conservatory.

Some of my overall duties within the Discovery Program included:

- Researching, creating, and editing programs and activities for the Discovery Program
- Working directly with children and families to provide our programs and activities
- Working directly with volunteers and providing an orientation to any new volunteers
- Staffing events such as Discovery Day, Bioblitz, and the Tropical Forest Hawaii Festival

While at Phipps I had the chance to revise and create some programs for their “Edible Garden.” In addition to this I also had two large container gardens I took care of to use as examples when families visited my station.

Reflection
My experience at Phipps opened my eyes to a completely new career path. I was originally planning on just going into sustainability, but after working in education and talking to some of the people at Phipps focusing on sustainability, I decided I would rather pursue environmental/outdoor education.

Going forward I plan to seek out similar experiences, most likely in a different setting, though. As much as I enjoyed working in a conservatory, I want to try new experiences while I’m still in college. I also hope to stay in Columbus at least for the next summer, so finding a local internship is my goal. Being originally from the Pittsburgh area helped me settle into the internship I think, but moving between cities just for the summer can be tough.

For any students interested in working in education I would recommend looking at all options available. I originally didn’t want to work with kids or families at all, but after seeing education wasn’t just in a classroom and could happen in multiple settings, I opened myself up to it, and I’m very glad I did.

Acknowledgements
I would like to say thank you to everyone at Phipps Conservatory for making my experience the best it could be, especially the Science Education and Discovery teams. I had learned an incredible amount and had some amazing experiences during my time at Phipps and it is all thanks to them.