

Teaching with Nature

Edited by Emily Pritchard

Sara Roberts spent the recent semester interning with DuPage County Forest Preserve in Illinois to compliment her Parks, Tourism & Recreation Management major and work closer to home. “This experience has been a wonderful and rewarding learning experience for me; I am glad I decided to step out of my comfort zone and give this opportunity a chance.”



First of all, you are originally from Illinois. What brought you to the University of Montana?

“There were a couple deciding factors that led me to UM. I wanted a school with a relatively small student population that also had a feeling of community. I felt that sense of community I desired when I stepped on campus at UM for my first campus visit. I also wanted to step out of my comfort zone by attending a school that was not in my home state. The college of Forestry & Conservation was ultimately what attracted me to UM. I knew I wanted to study conservation and UM had an amazing program for what I wanted to study. UM has a combination of everything I wanted in a school plus more to offer, it has been a great fit for me and I'm glad I made the decision to leave Illinois to attend UM!”

Briefly describe the organization/company you interned with.

“The DuPage County Forest Preserve is a conservation agency that focuses on preserving, maintaining and protecting natural resources and natural areas in DuPage County, IL. The Forest Preserve also provides opportunities for the general public to connect to nature through different outdoor programs and presentations.”

What were your responsibilities as an intern?

“As an intern with the DuPage County Forest Preserve I am a counselor for the Ranger Adventure Camp. During camp I am responsible for teaching the campers how to shoot archery, fish, and canoe. We also teach the children basic wilderness survival skills such as how to build a fire, use a compass and how to tie knots.”

Why did you decide on this internship?

“I wanted to teach the younger generation how to respect the natural environment while teaching them how to enjoy it at the same time. Being able to teach children my passions was an opportunity I found very attractive. During the summer of 2015 I was a seasonal ranger with the DuPage County Forest Preserve and I really enjoyed my time there. The ranger staff was a really great group of people to work with and I knew I wanted to join the agency again for another summer and the internship opportunity fit perfectly with my school curriculum.”

Did you run into any issues when creating the internship? How did your faculty advisor feel about it?

“I had no real difficulties during the internship process. Dr. Metcalf was extremely accommodating during the process and she was always available to talk about anything I needed and to answer any questions I had. After explaining a little bit about why I wanted to complete this particular internship she was on board 100% with no hesitations. Dr. Metcalf has been a really big support during the internship process and has been a vital component to the process running smoothly.”

What has been the most rewarding part of this experience?

“There are many rewarding aspects of my experience working with the campers. The one that sticks out the most would be seeing the children practice the new skills they have learned during camp. It is a wonderful feeling seeing a kid who has never caught a fish before catch their first fish and seeing the look of pure excitement on their face as they bring it to you to show you.”

What advice would you give other students considering opportunities like this?

“My advice to other students would be to stop considering it and just do it. An internship opens up many doors for you and allows you to see what it is you really want to do without any real commitments. Networking is an essential part to beginning your career and I believe that an internship allows you to get to know other people in your profession and could lead to something more in the future.”

Has this experience reaffirmed your career goals or has it changed your mind in any way?

“A little bit of both. This experience has most definitely reaffirmed my career goals, as I knew I wanted to work for a conservation agency but I realized that I would enjoy outdoor education not only with just children but people of all ages. I have really enjoyed helping others learn about something that I am extremely passionate about and I want to continue teaching and helping others learn how to respect the environment.”

How has your participation in this AE experience impacted your life as a student and as a person in general?

“My internship experience has impacted my life as a student and as a person in general in a very positive way. I have been able to apply information I have learned in school in a real life situation. I took a leadership class last semester and I have applied different leadership concepts I learned into leading the children.”

What’s your next step? Will you continue to work at the Preserve?

“I’m not sure what the future holds for me and I am taking it day by day. I will be graduating in the spring and will be looking for a place to begin my career. If that place is the DuPage County Forest Preserve I would be ecstatic. All that I can guarantee about my next step is that I will be working hard to continue protecting and preserving our natural environment to the best of my ability.”

