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## Comparison of Internships in the United States and Germany

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Comparison of internships in the United States and Germany

Kelsey Ennis

Lee Honors College Honors Thesis

December 2017

Public History as defined by Western Michigan University is a field of study which opens graduates to professions in, museums, monuments and memorials, historical and archeological sites, archives and libraries, national parks and other governmental organizations, as preservationists, as tour guides, interpreters, and historical re-enactors, or in education.<sup>1</sup> I chose this particular degree due to not wanting to be an in-school teacher, but still educate on the topic of history, and the professions outlined above fit what I want for my future. Through courses required and offered that I took, I learned the basics of running and working in a museum, but the highlight of my education was the time spent interning toward my degree. It allowed me a first-hand opportunity to test what was covered and learn what worked. I have conducted three separate internships over my course of study at Western Michigan University at three widely differing institutions, from strictly board run to nationally managed. My goal here in my thesis is to lay out where my internships were, what they consisted of and what was expected of me, and what I gained from each of them in terms of what I can use in the future as examples of what works in a museum. My positions at each of these museums was temporary, unpaid, and a part of my Public History Bachelor's Degree at Western Michigan University.

I completed a total of 560 hours collectively across my three internships; 240 at each of my first two and 120 at my last. The three places I interned at, in order, were the Music House Museum in Traverse City, Michigan; the Air Zoo in Kalamazoo, Michigan; and the Haus der

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<sup>1</sup> "Undergraduate Public History," *wmich.edu*, last modified 2017, <http://wmich.edu/history/undergradpublichistory>.

Geschichte, or House of History, in Bonn, Germany. Each internship consisted of different focuses and expectations to be outlined in the next section.

At each of the different locations, I was expected to be proficient in all areas I was assigned by the conclusion of each internship. At the Music House Museum in Traverse City, I was expected to capably conduct a memorized guided tour which lasted an hour and a half by myself, be familiar and comfortable with their point of sale system, and be acquainted with their cataloguing system, Past Perfect, as well as aware of their board management system. My second internship at the Air Zoo was focused on work associated with the Collection Manager's position. The expectations there for me started with becoming proficient in the collections program Past Perfect, and familiar with the demands and tasks surrounding the position of a Collections Manager. For the internship I held at the Haus der Geschichte in Germany, my objective was to become familiar with various different departments through light, short term tasks in each, in order to learn the broad needs of running a museum.

The Music House Museum in Traverse City, Michigan, where I conducted my first internship, is a museum of automated, mechanical, musical instruments dating from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 1950s, and focuses on guided tours as the main means of transferring information to the visitors. The collection ranges from music boxes, to player pianos, to large band hall organs, all of which are located in the original family barn in which the collection was started and the tours are held. Due to the fragile and cumbersome nature of many of the collection pieces, rotation of instruments is limited, making the exhibit static for most of the season. A rotation of smaller instruments is conducted yearly and a daily as well as seasonal rotation of music is conducted to maintain a fresh and interesting experience for repeat

visitors. Entrance to the Museum is possible 7 days a week for 6 hours a day from May to October with limited days in the winter. With this time schedule, the Music House Museum brought in 14,930 visitors in 2016. As is published in their Mission Statement: “The Music House Museum is a unique cultural organization. Our mission is to collect, restore, preserve, display and demonstrate automated musical instruments and related Americana and to educate and entertain people of all ages”.<sup>2</sup> The operating expense and revenue for the year I was there (2016) were \$240,090, and \$240,165 which evened out to a total of \$75 in Total Net unrestricted Activity.<sup>3</sup> With the restricted amounts, their Total Net Activity amounted to \$44,678.<sup>4</sup> The Music house Museum is run by a small board with minimal paid staff of 8 persons who are in charge of larger operations. 27 Volunteers help in giving tours, running fundraising events, grounds work, maintenance, and collections management. This overview should help put into perspective the size of the museum and their operating cost associated to their public offers.

My time at the Music House Museum was conducted from May to August of 2016 and was centered on work with a man named AJ, the Operations Manager, who assigned tasks, set goals and helped coordinate work with other staff members in various areas of the museum. As an intern at the Music House Museum, I was primarily given experience in giving guided tours as a docent and working sales in the gift shop and at the front desk. The guided tours were one and a half hours long and were required to be fully memorized and conducted with no

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<sup>2</sup> “Strategic Plan May 2016 to December 31, 2019,” *musichouse.org*, last modified July 14, 2016, <http://musichouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Strategic-Plan-2016-19.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> “Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs Funder Report: The Music House Museum,” *musichouse.org*, last modified May 30, 2017, <http://musichouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/2016-CDP-Profile.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

assistance by the end of my internship. Until that goal was met, the tours were conducted in sections and with the presence of an experienced docent. There were other areas that were minimally focused on; such as managing and organizing the collections space, community outreach and presence, and event coordination. Other areas that I had the opportunity to see were the running of a board meeting, an overview of the operations budget, and volunteer coordination.

From my experience there, I would say that with their resources in space, staff, funds and time, the Music House Museum was operating within their means while still working on making improvements toward the future of digitization and gaining younger audiences. One area that was being worked on in this way was the handling of the social media. The Museum's social media efforts, what is published to the public as a way to bring people into the museum, are primarily done through Facebook, radio advertisements, TV commercials, and a monthly newsletter. The organization and running of the accounts are handled by one person, who is also in charge of the financial reports. While younger generations are often using many more media platforms, especially online ones, to engage with the general public, the choices that the Music House Museum made of what to use is effective, and in personal questions on what caused guests to come in, many of the answers aside from hearing from a friend were the TV and radio announcements. In the Strategic Plan for 2016 to 2019, there are efforts being made to continue to explore media and integrate cell phone technology into the self-guided tour spaces, both of which speak to the forward motion toward digital technology integration of the

Music House Museum.<sup>5</sup> What I really appreciated at the Music House Museum and what I thought they excelled at with the set up they had, was the community involvement and use of space. As a smaller museum with limited exhibition rotation, the Music House Museum has made a point to hold events and engage the community in ways that would bring in a wide variety of audiences outside of normal operating hours. This goal was achieved by hosting events like silent movies, concerts showcasing local artists, private groups for a unique experience, and being a part of local festivities like the annual Cherry Festival by way of parade entries and child focused interactive displays like the portable organ grinder. Events like the movies were especially unique, as they were silent movies accompanied by a live organ performance. People attending, like myself, were able then to have a genuine silent movie experience and connect on a very personal level to the history surrounding them and appreciate what it took to have a successful movie experience. The concerts that were held at the museum usually featured either were local artist or showcased instruments similar to those in the collection at the museum such as piano or harp. Hosting private events could mean several different things for the Music House Museum. Examples of events that have been hosted successfully by the museum are weddings and car shows. The different contexts offered by the museum allow the collection to be explored by a wider scope of people, bringing extra revenue to the museum and giving the visitors the chance to personally interact and connect with the exhibition. The use of space and programming to engage patrons is something that I will certainly be carrying with me as I go on to other positions in my future career.

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<sup>5</sup> "Strategic Plan May 2016 to December 31, 2019," *musichouse.org*, last modified July 14, 2016, <http://musichouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Strategic-Plan-2016-19.pdf>.

My second internship was conducted at the Air Zoo, a Museum of Flight and Aviation History in Kalamazoo, MI. Their collection covers many aspects of flight history from the birth of aircraft to modern scientific findings and the context in history as science progressed. Published on their website is their Mission Statement to “preserve the legacy of flight for present and future generations.”<sup>6</sup> This they achieve through an immense collection, guided tours, educational opportunities, and social and educational functions. It should also be noted that the Air Zoo’s unique collection is made up in part by loans from the Smithsonian Institution and NASA, thoroughly enriching their collection and education opportunities. The Air Zoo operation costs of \$4,924,822 combined with the revenue of \$4,324,093 for the year that I was there comes out to a total of -\$484,423 including their restricted funds of \$116,306.<sup>7</sup> This is a much larger margin than the Music House Museum had, but considering the size and programs, this budgeting lies within their planning. The budget as well as the number of visitors is greatly increased at the Air Zoo, totaling 145,378 guests in 2016.<sup>8</sup> Many of these numbers come from school aged kids in the surrounding areas. Staff numbers, full and part time, come to 65, ranging from positions in collections, to reception, to media and financing. The volunteers, many of whom help with tours, events, collections and restoration of aircraft reach up to 190 in number, which includes full and part or one time volunteers.<sup>9</sup>

My internship at the Air Zoo amounted to a total of 240 hours from September of 2016 to February of 2017 under the direction of Christy Kincaid, the Operations Manager, Laurie, her

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<sup>6</sup> “About the Air Zoo,” *airzoo.org*, last modified 2009, [https://www.airzoo.org/page.php?menu\\_id=8](https://www.airzoo.org/page.php?menu_id=8).

<sup>7</sup> “Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs Funder Report: Kalamazoo Aviation History Museum dba Air Zoo and Air Zoo Legacy Foundation,” *airzoo.org*, last modified May 30, 2017, [https://www.airzoo.org/docs/forms/2016\\_air\\_zoo\\_mcac\\_funding\\_report\\_-\\_f3.pdf](https://www.airzoo.org/docs/forms/2016_air_zoo_mcac_funding_report_-_f3.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



assistant, and Keith Gill, her supervisor. My internship was classified as “Curatorial” and involved shadowing Christy in her work. My tasks included collection organization of a few boxes, digitizing photographs, and other jobs as assigned by Christy, Keith or Laurie. These tasks expanded to framing portraits for the Michigan Aviation Hall of Fame, moving artifacts between storage spaces, going on trips to obtain exhibit pieces and working on floor exhibit layout. I was shown first-hand the responsibilities that come with working in collections and how expansive they can be. One of the more intensive projects that I worked on was the organization of the collections space. The Air Zoo is still working on establishing their collection. Currently there is no single curatorial goal in terms of seeking out specific objects to enrich the collection. The main focus is to organize and consolidate what is currently in possession of the Air Zoo so that it can be better accessed and used to benefit the museum and researchers. This was a good way to see how managing a collection does not mean just seeking out items to build it, but to know how best to care for what you have and know when to deaccession or return certain items to their loaners.

The full integration I had and the responsibility the Air Zoo gave me were just what was needed to show the extent of what it was like to work in a collections department. I gained much in terms of what to expect and what works at a museum by working at the Air Zoo. This included the extent of uses of the cataloging program Past Perfect, the basics in collection organization and curating, and how and who to network with for a working, city wide team. As stated earlier, the Air Zoo is currently working on organizing and stabilizing their collection in a newly made collections space. Some of the difficulties in this project of moving artifacts and keeping the associated records is that there are many pieces that were acquired prior to a

digital cataloging system and others that never got properly accessioned. What I saw at the Air Zoo, however, was a strong and unyielding effort to rectify the records and ensure the safe storage of artifacts. With daily assignments such as exhibit preparation, donation integration and social media participation, the project of organizing the collection could have very easily been pushed to the side, left to build in complexity. My supervisor, Christy, took the approach of doing what was possible in the time she had. This meant that sometimes she was not able to work on the existing collection, sometimes she was able to go through one to four boxes a day. Working like this ensured that progress was made even as time went on. There was also outreach to volunteers and interns to assist help in this endeavor. What I did, digitizing records and photographs and organizing boxes allowed for greater focus to be applied to the current and future collections. I was not there as unpaid labor by any means, but was an important part in aiding the museum move forward, and this was something that I was proud to be a part of. I was also very pleased to be a part of a larger community with the Air Zoo, as I discovered in attending local Museum meetings with my supervisor. Meetings were held monthly between the local museums of Kalamazoo, such as the Air Zoo, the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, the Gilmore Car Museum, and the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts at varying locations. During the meetings, areas of concern about various situations like floods and disaster preparedness were addressed, plans of new exhibits were shared, and requests for aid in specific areas were not held back. The community extended beyond these meetings as well to conferences hosted around Michigan in the Museum field. The clear, healthy, relationships I saw between the Air Zoo and other Kalamazoo Museums is part of what helped the Air Zoo be where it is in its

success in my opinion. This kind of teamwork and networking internally and externally is something that I will look for, and encourage at wherever I find myself working.

My third and last internship was held at the Haus der Geschichte in Bonn, Germany as part of a study abroad trip lasting 5 months. The Haus der Geschichte, or House of History in English, houses a collection addressing the history of Germany from 1945 to present day. There is no strict mission statement, but there is a goal to “present German history from the end of the Second World War to the present – in exhibitions, events, online projects and publications.”<sup>10</sup> Unlike the first two internships that I held in Michigan, the Haus der Geschichte was not classified as a 501c3 nonprofit, but rather was funded by the Federal Republic of Germany. Established in 1986 and then fully opened in 1994, the Haus der Geschichte was created to help illuminate the tumultuous history that defines Germany in the recent past.<sup>11</sup> The money to fund operations comes from taxes and goes toward the Bonn location as well as two other affiliate museums in Berlin and Leipzig, Germany. Between the three branches, temporary exhibitions along with the artifacts are shared and traded, ensuring mass coverage in Germany of the traveling exhibitions as well as a larger artifact repository to pull from for other exhibits. Records of attendance at the Haus der Geschichte include five other Museums on the same stretch of street called Museumsmeile, or Museum Mile. In 2016 their combined attendance amounted to 1.5 million guests who visited the history, art museums, and supported festivals.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Organization Overview, Experience History,” *Haus der Geschichte Bonn*, accessed June 13, 2017, <https://www.hdg.de/en/haus-der-geschichte/organization/>.

<sup>11</sup> Serge Schmemmann, “Berlin; Germans Argue over a Museum That Will Offer A Probing Look At Their History,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1988, <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/05/15/arts/berlin-germans-argue-over-museum-that-will-offer-probing-look-their-history.html>.

<sup>12</sup> “Museumsmeile Bonn, Touristik,” *Museumsmeile Bonn*, accessed June 13, 2017, <http://www.museumsmeilebonn.de/>.

My internship there ran from April to June of 2017 and was conducted as an introduction to the running of a museum, and involved looking into the various departments that work together to ensure a smoothly run museum. The areas I worked and shadowed in the most were new exhibition preparation, community participation, traveling exhibitions, and social media publication. I was also led through the work spaces of the Registrars, Collections Managers, and photographers of collection pieces for documentation and publication purposes. My supervisors were much the same as my areas of focus, as they changed depending on what area I was working in at that time but my main supervisor was the personnel manager of the Haus der Geschichte, Herr Berg, who initially approved my internship and who accepted my concluding report.

The first area I shadowed was the exhibition development office. There were several different teams working on various exhibitions for the upcoming months and years. The office I was placed in had a timeline that reached a full year out and working team of at least 7 people. Their exhibition for the fall of 2018 is titled, as of right not, "Very British" and explores the relationships between Germany and Britain over the years. As an intern, I got to see the effort put forth in gathering information and artifacts from various museums and persons mostly located in the UK, and hear the results of progress meetings and ask questions as far as policies for borrowing artifacts and how the creative process works in putting together a good exhibition. To be able to plan out that far in advance and have the personnel to focus on those tasks is certainly a sign of a well-run exhibitions department. In my time working with those focused on community involvement, I was a part of preparation being done in anticipation of the UN Climate Change Conference which took place in Bonn in November. I had the job of

traveling around Bonn taking pictures of large panels detailing the city's history which were maintained by the Haus der Geschichte. The pictures I took, I then analyzed to document differences in text between the panels, printed, and online copies. When my report was completed, it was used to pin point areas of concern and delegate focus to edit, clean, or replace what was needed.

The last place at the Haus der Geschichte that I was stationed at was the Social Media and Online offices. At the online editing office, their social media hub, I put together several prototype Twitter and Instagram posts, wrote a short bio of myself for their Facebook page, proofread English translations of the Haus der Geschichte website to then later be published, and made my own video of the current exhibition on Germans and their cars which was published on their YouTube channel. These tasks I completed covered all online media platforms used by the Haus der Geschichte. Working firsthand in the social media office was crucial for me to understand what a successful media department could do for a museum. The difficulties associated with publishing on social media, such as following copyright laws, which are different in Germany, and maintaining concise but interesting post on a regular basis were only truly realized after working in such a demanding but fun environment. One of my favorite tasks that I completed while in the social media office was that of proofreading English translations of the main museum website. Aside from having their main website accessible in both English and German, the Haus der Geschichte has offerings in ten different languages prepared for in house guided tours. With this great variety of languages and their multiple media platforms of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and YouTube, the potential number of guests at the Haus der Geschichte is increased by every different option. This diversity in

comparison with the earlier two places I interned at, in my own view, is a lot of what makes the Haus der Geschichte so successful with such a wide scope of people. With those thoughts though, must come the acceptance that the Haus der Geschichte is very different from the Air Zoo and the Music House Museum in target audience, funding, topic, and staff. That does not mean, however, that those goals cannot be implemented here in the United States.

The point of an internship is to prepare a student for work in the selected field, to help them gain experience and a notion of what will be expected of them once they start applying for careers while nearing and after graduation. As far as my experiences went, the basics of working in a museum were very well met through my three internships. I learned how to successfully give tours, how to operate the cataloging system and use it to organize a collection, and the various aspects of exhibit work from year-long preparation to getting ready to ship out a traveling exhibition as well as some tactics to use on social media to bring visitors in. The technical aspects I experienced are no doubt very useful to my future career, but what I did not fully expect was the goal making and vision that would come from my time at the three museums. In learning the technical parts of running a museum, I was inadvertently shown what works and what to look for and seek out in a successful set up in a museum. At the Music House Museum in Traverse City I learned how to maximize an otherwise small space and how to engage audiences with the long since gone technology of mechanical musical instruments. At the Air Zoo I was given a crash course in managing a disorganized collection from my supervisor, but through that found that collection management is a multi-step process that changes with space availability and technology such as cataloging programs. At the Air Zoo, there were unlabeled objects found almost every day but by processing them, the collection

grew in integrity and usefulness, there was no lost cause. The third and last Museum I interned at taught me a lot in terms of international relations and social media. Their well-developed and organized base museum allowed for more energy to be focused on local and international networking as well as a strong social media department which led to an offer of multiple languages and strong relationships with their viewers by keeping them informed and curious as the Haus der Geschichte curated their history.

For the last section of my thesis I would like to address how the positive experiences and implementations from the Haus der Geschichte in Germany can be brought to the United States, specifically Michigan. To start, what I greatly appreciated from the Haus der Geschichte was the department strictly devoted to related online work. With hard work, this kind of set up can be achieved for many museums, but it relies on allocated funds and size, which would require long term planning and dedication. The accessibility of multiple languages is something that I believe can be achieved in Michigan. According to the Statistic Atlas website, there are 271 thousand persons in Michigan who speak Spanish at home, making up 2.9% of the total population that speaks a different language other than English at home.<sup>13</sup> This may seem like a small amount, but it also does not account for guests from other states who speak the language. The majority of this 2.9% are located on the Western side of the state such as in Holland and Wyoming.<sup>14</sup> I believe that in locations such as these where the population is of a greater density, offering Spanish online or with major exhibits would increase the potential audience size and overall attendance. Kalamazoo on its own has 5.5 % of the 2.9% that speak

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<sup>13</sup> "Languages in Michigan (State)," *Statistical Atlas*, last modified April 17, 2015, <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/Michigan/Languages>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Spanish, and so could even be considered here although not to as great an extent.<sup>15</sup> As of right now, the Holland website does not offer another language other than English on their homepage, but I still believe that having the option, if possible, would be beneficial to the museums in Michigan.<sup>16</sup> Currently the Haus der Geschichte has texts in their permanent and traveling exhibitions in both German and English, but a point to notice is that the portions that were in English as well as German were only the very large transitional points that overviewed that particular section of the exhibition. Starting in small ways like that would be a good way to integrate multiple languages into our museums. Another language to be considered for this initiative would be sign language, specifically aimed at front of house employees and tour guides. If an increase in attendance or a new enthusiasm is noticed, or lack thereof, changes can be made accordingly.

Secondly, the expansive use of social media platforms used at the Haus der Geschichte is something that can be easily be brought over and incorporated into the museums I interned at in Michigan. When looking at the homepage of the Haus der Geschichte, clear links are available at bottom of the page to their active accounts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube.<sup>17</sup> This is in contrast to both the Air Zoo and the Music house Museum. While both advertise their Facebook pages on their homepage, the Air Zoo also has their Twitter account linked in, by adding links to their existing Instagram and YouTube accounts and ensuring that they stay active, even by posting the same content across the varying platforms, it is possible to

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<sup>15</sup> "Languages in Michigan (State)," *Statistical Atlas*, last modified April 17, 2015, <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/Michigan/Languages>.

<sup>16</sup> "Holland Michigan Area Visitors Bureau," *holland.org*, last modified 2017, <http://www.holland.org/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Haus Der Geschichte Bonn," *Stifung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, accessed June 13, 2017, <https://www.hdg.de/haus-der-geschichte/>.



maintain contact with a broader range of people and help ensure that the largest number of people get the latest updates on events and exhibitions. Another tactic that I saw to be very effective at the Haus der Geschichte was their participation online with other museums. Events hosted through Twitter such as Museum Week are a way for museums all across the world to participate in sharing interesting parts of their collections and spark interest on a larger scale. Other activities like doing a “this day in history”, “today from our collection” through Facebook and Instagram, or live tweeting events are also ways to keep audiences attentive and interested. By joining in these online events, museums like the Air Zoo and the Music House Museum can gain publicity and recognition from many more museums which could lead to unknown professional networking opportunities. Even without a huge social media department, improvements like these can be made toward a wider scope of social media outreach here in Michigan at the Air Zoo and the Music House Museum and can also be fulfilled by attending topic related or museum general conferences hosted around Michigan, such as the Air Zoo already does.

Going into completing the internships, I was nervous and anxious about what to expect. I was worried that the work load would be too much or that I wouldn't be able to handle it. Alternately I worried that I would be doing small, pointless tasks unrelated to Public History. What I found, however, was a rich experience with practical application of what I learned and a new confidence in my ability to work successfully in my field. The internships that I helped with were all very different, they had good and great points, and other points that served as learning experiences on what could be better. The people I worked with and the things I did weren't so different across the board. In a community of museum staff, volunteers, donors, board

members, coordinators, publishers and editors, finding support and encouragement was never difficult. No matter where I end up, and even if I had conducted different internships, I am confident that where I go will be a similar feeling place, especially now when everything is changing so quickly every day. I trust I will not be without a forward thinking, creative, dedicated and insightful team, and I will do all I can to successfully integrate what I learned from my internships into future careers.

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