

Prospectus

“Humanities in the Parks” Internships

University of Colorado
Center for the Humanities and the Arts
Center for Science and Technology Policy Research

The National Park Service

The Concept

Place graduate students in the humanities (e.g., history, literature, philosophy, religious studies, fine arts) in National Park System areas to serve as interns to help interpret the natural and cultural resources of the parks (<http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/parks>).

Program Goals

- Enhance visitor experience at National Park System areas
- Provide heritage interpretation and education to the public
- Help protect park resources
- Develop new models for interdisciplinary heritage education applicable at colleges and universities
- Provide new career opportunities for students with advanced degrees in the humanities

Introduction

“Programs, exhibits, and audiovisual presentations must be developed for different ages and in multiple languages. New methods are needed to reach audiences from disparate cultures.

“Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century,” National Park System Advisory Board

This is a time of tremendous opportunity for the National Park Service. People have always visited the national parks as a break from their everyday world, to discover their heritage, and to contemplate our nation’s marvelous landscapes and scenic wonders. Today we are beginning to add new dimensions to traditional park experiences. Citizens can visit parks online as well as physically. New outreach services are being developed to bring appreciation and enjoyment of the national parks into neighborhoods and communities. There is a growing public awareness that park landscapes encompass more than the widely known “crown jewel” parks that are most often the subject of calendar photos—that the National Park System encompasses 386 places with a wide variety of natural and cultural resources. There is also an on-going renaissance and expansion in the relationship of parks to people. National parks and cities are no longer seen as distant and disconnected from one another. Not only are our urban national parks becoming more vital centers of public enjoyment and education, but new technologies such as the Internet are bringing parks into the homes, schools, libraries, and community centers of large urban populations.

In a report issued in 2001, “Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century,” The National Park System Advisory Board, offered a set of recommendations that the National Park Service. These recommendations argued that the Park Service should:

- become a more significant part of America's educational system;

- encourage the study of the American past;
- adopt the concepts of biodiversity and sustainability;
- acknowledge the connections between native cultures and the parks; and
- encourage collaboration among park systems at every level—federal, regional, state, and local.

We propose a program that addresses these recommendations, enhancing not only traditional park visits but embracing new opportunities as well. This is a heritage education program that utilizes an abundant, inexpensive, and untapped resource: graduate students in the fine arts and humanities. Humanities and fine arts graduate students are uniquely positioned to help Americans explore the full range of the meanings (philosophical, aesthetic, and historical) that make our parks important in the first place. They can provide access to the literature and history of human interaction with nature, and place the history, experience, and management of parks within larger aesthetic, social, and ethical contexts. These students also have the research abilities, creativity, and drive to design powerfully relevant informational and interpretive materials for park audiences. The "Humanities in the Parks" internship program holds the promise of helping the National Park Service substantially increase public enjoyment and understanding of our national heritage.

Program Structure

We propose to place graduate students in the humanities (e.g., literature, history, philosophy, religious studies, fine arts) within various units of the National Park Service for periods of 12 to 14 weeks. Student interns will:

- Already have taken a graduate course at their home institution in environmental humanities.
- Participate in "Public Humanities," a two-week seminar in May of each year at the University of Colorado, which will train interns in the skills of translating the insights and perspectives of the humanities for a variety of audiences.
- Serve in an internship for 12 to 14 weeks.
- Be eligible for a dissertation fellowship to continue their work on the themes of their internship.
- Internships may either be on-site, involve occasional visits, or be done remotely.

The program will be led by the two co-directors, who will review applications, run the Maymester course, and oversee the progress of the interns; and by a program manager, who will supervise advertising and make extensive contact with the various units of the National Park System. The National Park Service will be closely involved in all aspects of the program.

Interns will be drawn from a national pool of graduate students. We have especially good connections with the following universities, which have strong environmental humanities programs and have already expressed interest in placing graduate students in this program: University of Colorado at Boulder, the University of Houston, and the University of North Texas. In addition, two national professional groups, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, and the International Association for Environmental Philosophy, are partners with Humanities in the Parks, and will disseminate information about the internships throughout their membership.

Applications for internships will be accepted in the fall, with a December 1 deadline. Concurrently, the program manager will contact National Park System areas, to solicit interest and begin the process of identifying the needs of particular parks. Selection of interns will be made by March 15, in consultation with the specific parks. At that time, interns will receive their assignments with a specific park.

Interns will then attend a two-week Maymester course, entitled "Public Humanities," held on the campus of the University of Colorado at Boulder. The Maymester course will be taught by the two co-directors, in conjunction with National Park Service personnel out of the Denver Regional Office of the

National Park Service. Mornings will be spent in lecture and discussion of program themes. These lectures will cover two areas: various subjects in the environmental humanities, and how to effectively communicate the insights and perspectives of the humanities to a national park audience. In the afternoons interns will work on the specific projects that will be part of their individual internship. By the end of the two week session interns will have made significant progress on their internship topic, thereby ‘jumpstarting’ their internship.

After the first summer, we will run a second competition each year for a Humanities in the Parks dissertation fellowship. We anticipate that these year-long internships will go to the most successful of the previous year’s interns, to continue the work begun in their internship; but we will also advertise these fellowships nationwide. The goal of this fellowship is to support a student Ph.D. dissertation on a subject pertinent to the needs of the park. These year-long appointments will also be selected in conjunction with the National Park Service.

Intern Projects

Interns can make valuable contributions to the goals of improving park management and visitor experience by:

- leading hikes and making public presentations to help visitors deepen their appreciation of the aesthetic, intellectual, and contemplative motivations that brought them to the park, as well as ethical, cultural, and historical aspects of park management;
- helping parks design interpretive and educational media (brochures, exhibits, photographs, documentaries, etc.) that more powerfully highlight these aspects of the park;
- conducting training seminars (for instance, "short courses" in environmental ethics, history, or aesthetics) to help NPS personnel (often trained in the sciences) to better articulate these perspectives and share them with park audiences; and
- creating training materials that the National Park Service can use in its own efforts to continually educate and professionalize its workforce.

While many people visit national parks for aesthetic reasons—because of the beauty and sublimity of natural landscapes, and the cultural values associated with historical sites—personal services, exhibits, and printed media often primarily address only the scientific or historical aspect of these resources. Our goal is to enhance and broaden the relevance of these services by more deeply integrating scientific and historical information with aesthetic and philosophical perspectives in ways that will make the significance of parks more accessible and intuitive for visitors.

Impacts

A pilot version of this program was run in 2000. In the program’s first year (spring/summer 2000), 15 graduate students enrolled in "Public Humanities." With financial support from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, the University of Colorado, and the National Park Service, we were able to support the placement of two interns with the National Park Service for the summer of 2000 (chosen by mutual decision of the project directors and the National Park Service).

The first year’s program was a notable success. Within the National Park Service, over 40 parks and monuments responded to an e-mail invitation concerning this program and the hosting of humanities interns. The majority of these parks offered “in-kind” support (e.g., housing within the park) and/or stipend support. Limitations in funding, however, restricted us to two interns for the summer of 2000.

Our hope is that “Humanities in the Parks” can grow to become a much more substantial effort in subsequent years. By way of comparison, a “Geologists in the Parks” initiative that was started three years ago with five interns currently has 40 geologists interning at National Parks System areas.

We anticipate that this program will have an impact upon three distinct constituencies: park visitors, the interns themselves, and the culture of higher education.

1. The greatest single point of impact will be upon visitors to the National Park System. To take one example, nearly 5 million people visit Grand Canyon National Park each year. Internship projects such as the design or redesign of brochures, exhibits, and signage have the potential to affect nearly every visitor to the park.
2. The potential for influencing the future careers of the interns is quite great. The internships will affect their future academic career, and provide a powerful new model for the role of the humanities in society. The creation of a number of books and articles on the National Park System is a natural outgrowth of these internships.
3. In addition, we hope that these internships will have a lasting effect upon the culture of higher education, suggesting to colleges and universities nationwide that the humanities can have a much greater role in the life of our society.

Budget (see spreadsheet)

Note: It is the intent of the partners to use National Park Service endorsement of the Humanities in the Parks internships as an entrée to seek program funding from the private sector, philanthropic foundations, and other sources of support. The National Park Service will work with the partners to provide in-kind support such as intern housing.

Institutional Support

Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment
Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation
International Association for Environmental Philosophy
Center for Environmental Philosophy