

THURSDAY CAREERS CHATS

Date of Session: 9-29-11 Title of Session: Museum Careers
Alumni Presenter: Mark Thompson Class Year: 1975
Title: Executive Director Employer: Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum

Notes from Session:

Background

- After graduating from Dickinson with an english major, he worked at a museum for a year in Philadelphia. He then transitioned to law school and ultimately worked as a trial lawyer for 20 years. After coming to the realization that his legal career wasn't fulfilling to him, he decided to give up his law practice and seek a career he would enjoy, which ended up being museums. (He finds it to be a good field because of the intellectual challenges, finds it to be less stressful than some other fields, and gets lots of fulfillment from his work).
- He went to the University of Delaware and got a master's in history with a certification in museum studies.
- He was in a unique position because of his extensive background in law, so his first jobs out were not the typical first jobs – Executive Director of a small museum, then a regional director of a large museum, then then ultimately an executive director at a larger museum.

The Museum Field

- The Executive Director is the person in charge. They provide a vision for the museum and serve as the public face/spokesperson. It's an administrative position, but also involves "fun stuff" like exploring what the next museum exhibit will be.
- There are a variety of career options – executive director, curator (works under the director), exhibit curator (presents concepts of exhibit to the director), collections curator (in charge of "stuff"), conservator (conserves artifacts), educator (adult programs and/or school-ages programs). Also, there's marketing, development, event planning...
- There are many types of museums – history, science, art, historical houses, botanical gardens/planetariums/zoos.

How Can I Get There?

- A related major is good, but if you don't have one it won't be too much of a detriment.
- An internship is helpful, and museums are always looking for interns.
- Join a museum organization, such as the American Association of Museums.
- Look at job boards to get an understanding of possible jobs.
 - o AAM (American Association of Museums)
 - o AASLH (American Association for State and Local History)
 - o New England Museum Association
 - o State museum associations
 - o National Council of Public History (public history is a term used for the museum field)
 - o Usajobs.gov
 - o Muse Weekly (The University of Delaware Department of Museum Studies sends a list of conferences, programs, workshops, internships and jobs)
- You don't necessarily need to know the museum's specific content area to be marketable to that museum, having museum experience and related skills is more important.
- You can get a job right out of college, but in order to advance you'll need an additional degree. (It's rare to get a PhD, but some have it. A lot have master's degrees.)
 - o Two types of graduate programs – master's in museum studies and master's in a subject (such as history) with a certificate in museum studies. The later is more common, and the underlying subject can be pretty much anything.
- Most jobs are posted (versus needing to network). This makes the job search a bit easier, but it's also more competitive.
- There ARE jobs.
- Compensations isn't huge (entry level can be as low as \$28,000, \$35 with a master's). It's not a lucrative career, but with a slow and steady rise in the museum field you can make a good salary.