Request for Haverford College intern/January 13, 2016

Contact:

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Description of organization:

“The Birthplace of American MedicineSM” (National Historic Landmark) and one of the oldest professional organization in the country, The College of Physicians of Philadelphia was founded in 1787 “to advance the science of medicine and to thereby lessen human misery.” Today, over 1,500 Fellows (elected members) continue to convene at the College and work towards better serving the public. Throughout its 200 year history, the College has provided a place for both medical professionals and the general public to learn about medicine as both a science and as an art. This historic spirit continues in our current mission: advancing the cause of health, while upholding the ideals and heritage of medicine. The College collections exist within the Mütter Museum and the Historical Medical Library.

The Mütter Museum is one of the oldest medical museums in the country and houses one of the greatest collections of 18th and 19th century medical teaching specimens. The collection is comprised of approximately 25,000 objects including human remains (over 1,200 biological wet specimens, 1,400 human bones, lithics, dried preparations and corrosions); 12,000+ medical instruments and apparati, primarily dating between 1750 and the present; approximately 400 anatomical models in plaster, wax, paper- mâché and plastic; 1,700 historical medical illustrations in the form of lantern slides, photographs and prints; and memorabilia of outstanding physicians and scientists. Our collections provide a particular insight into human biology and the history of medicine and medical education. By placing medicine and science in a broader context, we encourage patrons to consider the cultural and social aspects of health and medicine.

Many of our collections reflect the interest and involvement of Philadelphia physicians in national and international affairs. In 1865, a messenger from the Surgeon General conveyed to
the Museum a specimen connected with one of the nation’s most tragic events: a “piece of the thorax of J. Wilkes Booth, assassin of President Lincoln,” which had been removed during the autopsy conducted by Philadelphia surgeon Joseph Janvier Woodward. The Museum continues to receive medical instruments and specimens donated by Fellows, other physicians, and their families. Recent acquisitions include a 1949 Emerson iron lung, 670 brain specimens encased in acrylic, a large collection of 19th-century fracture splints, and a portion of Albert Einstein’s brain (on microscope slides).

Established in 1788, the Historical Medical Library was Philadelphia’s central medical library for over 150 years, serving its medical schools, hospitals, physicians and other health professionals. Today, it is an independent research library devoted to the history of medicine and serves hundreds of scholars, health professionals, students, and popular writers each year.

The College’s collection of early printed books includes more than four hundred incunables, or editions printed before 1501. Among our more than 12,000 other rare books are the majority of editions that laid the basis of modern biomedicine—including one of the world’s best copies of William Harvey’s *De motu cordis* [On the Motion of the Heart] (1628) which first described the circulation of the blood, and two copies of *De humani corporis fabrica* [On the Fabric of the Human Body] (1543) by Andreas Vesalius, which was responsible for the later development of both modern anatomy and modern medical illustration. Among the Library’s first acquisitions was the founding book of modern pathology, *De sedibus et causis morborum* [On the Seats and Causes of Disease] by Giambattista Morgagni, published in Venice in 1761; it was presented by the author to visiting Philadelphia physician John Morgan, who later donated it to the College.

In addition to its rare books and 19th- and 20th-century collections, the College Library is notable for its manuscripts and archives. Within this collection are the College’s own archives, the archives of other Philadelphia medical institutions, and letters, case books, and student notebooks that document the personal life and professional practice of doctors in the Philadelphia region and around the world.

**Proposed work for an intern:**

During the summers of 2010 through 2015, the College benefitted greatly from the work of Haverford students on topics including a photographic history of the College, creation of digital exhibits, and researching a Civil War exhibition (particularly the compilation of bibliographies and lists pertinent to the exhibition now on view, *Broken Bodies, Suffering Spirits: Injury, Death, and Healing in Civil War Philadelphia*). Civil War-related projects continue but planning has begun for a new permanent exhibit to follow *Broken Bodies*, for which intern assistance is vital.

**Primary task:**

During 2015, the Mütter Museum began planning for the next permanent exhibition (meaning at least a five-year run) which will address the flu pandemic of 1918-19. This exhibit will have a Philadelphia focus and may examine how the medical infrastructure and the public understood and coped with the pandemic. During the summer of 2015, the Haverford intern conducted a survey of the museum collections for objects and specimens that have story-telling appeal for possible display in the exhibit; a survey of appropriate items in the collection of the Historical
Medical Library; and the creation of a concept document that suggests themes and stories appropriate to the exhibition. These activities have provided a solid platform for planning, but in 2016 we are applying for grant funds to convene meetings with two curators—one in the arts and the other in history—and an artist to conceptualize the exhibition to feature a commissioned work of art which meshes with historical themes. Given the research undertaken in 2015, the task for 2016 is to research and develop personal stories of Philadelphia people who endured the epidemic. Philadelphia was the American city hardest hit by the epidemic and suffered the highest number of deaths. Stories might include the personal experiences of a young medical student, a nurse, an African American laborer, or an Irish immigrant working in the shipyard. Through research into our archives and other materials, the intern will identify a group of individuals, sketch their biographies, and construct a narrative of their experiences with the epidemic. This task presents an opportunity to break ground on the next permanent exhibition at the Mütter Museum and to receive credit on an exhibit panel.

Secondary task:

The Benjamin Rush Medicinal Plants Garden at the College constitutes a living, outdoor exhibition of plants with medicinal qualities. We need to upgrade the experience of visitors to the garden by improving signage and creating a digital exhibit map with pop-up images from the botanical works in our Historical Medical Library and historical information on the medical uses and history of the plants. The Digital Garden Map and Exhibit project requires the intern to research some botany, locate historical illustrations in our library and identify medicinal uses of each of the 62 plants in the recently-renovated garden. The intern engaged in this project will gather relevant information and botanical illustrations and write a short paragraph for each plant. The resulting work will be used to develop an online inventory and map component for the outdoor living exhibition.

All projects are scalable to the abilities and backgrounds of the students and the time they can devote. Projects are supervised by the Librarian, exhibitions manager, or the director.

Skills and experience offered:

The internship affords a rare experience to work with primary materials within one of the most important special collections libraries in the country. Students would learn archival methods, exhibition practices, cataloguing, and electronic organization and management of records. Students with some skills in librarianship, archives, or information technology would be valuable for College work. Students would need to be meticulous, careful with rare and fragile materials, and be well organized. An ability to express oneself well in writing is important. The primary task requires the student to having a good esthetic eye with photographs, art, and other images, and experience with social media.

Challenges for undergraduate students:

This work requires maturity and self-discipline in attending to the meticulous requirements of working with old documents and objects: sensitivity to wear and tear, respect for the materials, and a sense of their value. The work may be semi-independent in that the student may be
working out of sight of the librarian or director or exhibits manager but will need to be inquisitive and not hesitant about asking questions.

**Rewards for interns:**

As noted above, this internship is a rare opportunity to work directly with primary materials in the history of medicine and learn the protocols for such work. The College draws much interest each year from prospective interns, although few are chosen. The College places priority on providing students with meaningful and necessary work. It is important to the College to work with “feeder” institutions of higher learning to create more understanding of the importance of historic collections in scholarship and public understanding. Finally, the student will be credited in any publications or exhibits that follow from the work.

**Conditions of work:**

Work takes place during normal weekday working hours, Monday-Friday. No evening or weekend work is anticipated. No travel is anticipated.

**Supervising the student:**

The Librarian or Curator (or her designee) will train and directly supervise the student for work conducted in the Historical Medical Library or Mütter Museum, as appropriate. The Director (Hicks) will oversee the student’s work.