From Internship to Career: Landon Wilkey and Raelyn Embleton

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Each semester, our students enhance their educational experience with internships that provide valuable skills and on-the-job training. Some students choose to intern at museums, historical societies, and libraries in Cache Valley, including Brigham City Museum, Hyrum City Museum, and Merrill-Cazier Library Special Collections. Others head a little further south to Ogden to take advantage of opportunities at Hill Aerospace Museum, which interprets the history of aviation and the U.S. Air Force. Two former graduate students, Landon Wilkey and Raelyn Embleton, describe their paths from intern to employee at Hill and reflect on how their internships provided the necessary foundation for a career in public history.

Landon Wilkey (History, MA ’18)

I started volunteering at the Hill Aerospace Museum in February of 2013, but my curatorial internship there was during the summer of 2016. My favorite project was creating an exhibit design proposal for a new fire and rescue exhibit. I have a particular interest in Air Force Fire Protection so this was a lot of fun to work on. I researched documents and photographs depicting Hill’s firefighting history and the evolution of firefighting technologies. I also had the opportunity to interview the base fire chief, Paul Erickson, to learn about current operations. The end product was potential exhibit text, images, and artifacts that can be used for the display when it is finally assembled.

After my internship, I was offered a part-time position primarily involving museum operations. In this position I still performed some research and created an exhibit design plan regarding the Cold War, but my primary role was helping with day-to-day operations of the facility. I served on staff in this position from July 2017 until my departure in April 2019.

Hill’s director, Aaron Clark, has known director Jim Petersen of the Historic Wendover Airfield for some time. When Jim mentioned they were considering hiring their first curator, Aaron recommended me for the job due to my experience with aviation history and public history at Hill, and because I was nearing completion of my MA in History at USU and looking for full-time employment. The recommendation from Hill was the key to my being hired as museum curator of the Historic Wendover Airfield. All the knowledge I acquired from my time at Hill has been useful for my current work from collections management, to label writing, and even just the general management of a facility. The fact that Hill managed Wendover Air Force Base for nearly two decades while it was an active military facility makes my move to the Historic Wendover Airfield all the more meaningful.

Landon Wilkey holds the service award he received for his 6 years spent at Hill.
Landon Wilkey with the Historic Wendover Airfield's WWII crash truck.

Raelyn Embleton (History, MS '19)

When I started my fellowship at Hill in the summer of 2018, I was leading a team of six other interns and training them for our STEM Summer Passport Program. Thousands of students come through every summer for classes on electricity, magnets, weather, chemistry, and more. Near the end of the summer, I was hired for a part-time position in the Education Program and worked in this capacity until I was about to graduate with my MS from USU. At that point, I approached the Foundation about the possibility of being hired full-time. I am now the Associate Director for Education at the Hill Aerospace Museum. The core part of my job is teaching classes, including Newton’s Laws, Tilt of the Earth, and the C-130 Experience, but I am also beginning to look at ways to expand our Education Program in the future.

One project we did that stands out was last fall when we approached Clark Planetarium in Salt Lake City with an opportunity to have a special guest teach classes for the 50th anniversary of the moon landing. We contacted Jessica Vos, an aerospace engineer who focuses on human performance in space at the Johnson Space Center, and she came out for a week. While here, she taught a class for kids focusing on what is necessary for human space exploration. She also gave lectures for adults on the same topic, and we designed experiments to go along with her classes. For example, we built an electrolysis device that separates hydrogen and oxygen in water. Once the hydrogen and oxygen are separated, you can explosively combine the gases back together. The event was really successful and it provided an educational and fun experience.