

Clemson Horticulture *Student Essay*

Internship Experience at The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University

By Andrew H. Thomas

I am a junior horticulture major at Clemson University. Internships are required for all horticulture majors. I found Arnold Arboretum located in Boston, Massachusetts and it had an Ivy League affiliation so I was immediately intrigued. I applied and interviewed for the summer intern position and they hired me. I was a bit nervous on my first day, but that was put to rest quickly as the staff and crew were extremely hospitable and friendly.

Mr. Andrew Gapinski was my supervisor at Arnold. He and I agreed that I would experience all aspects of maintaining an arboretum. He also stated that education would be a major part of the internship. I was thoroughly impressed by the quality of this internship. I worked with many different people on the grounds doing typical maintenance operations. I was also able to visit many area horticultural sites including, Chanticleer, Smith College, Polly Hill Botanic Garden, the Hunnewell Estate, the Fredrick Law Olmstead National Historic Site, and the Boston Public Gardens. Along with that the interns were given at least one formal class a week with practical application. This included herbarium specimen collecting and mounting, pruning, propagation, welding, greenhouse operations, and integrated pest management. Interns also spent a week working with the arborists, where we learned to climb trees, and operate a chainsaw and boom truck. Finally, the interns worked together on a predetermined group project onsite at the Hunnewell Welcome Center. I honestly cannot believe how well rounded and organized this experience was. I had no idea that I would be climbing trees, operating heavy equipment, and learning to do metal work. They are true professionals.

I noticed numerous occasions where things I have learned in the classroom were apparent. The most prominent would have been plant identification. There was not an hour that went by that I did not find myself asking, "What plant is that?" This was due to the immense diversity of Arnold. I did very well in Hort 303 where plant identification was a major portion of the course. I found myself breaking the plants down, like looking at the bark, leaf venation,

margins, arrangements, flowers and their parts, I also looked at the overall form to make an educated guess as to the identification of the plant. These were all things that Dr. Polomski taught in his class. All of the interns had a class in the greenhouse one day, and the coordinator told us that they had not used pesticides in twelve years. They were very proud of that. He said that they only use beneficial insects. A beneficial insect is one that is released into a greenhouse to feed on or parasitize the target pest. We learned about this in Hort 210 from Dr. Faust. In Dr. Vincent's Hort 101 course we learned about the benefits and proper application of mulch. Mulch is generally applied between 3-4 inches deep and helps reduce compaction, aids in water retention, adds organic matter, and suppresses weeds. On one of my first days at Arnold I was working in a four-acre formal garden. I said to the Horticulture Technician in charge of that area, "Why don't you use mulch? You would have less weeds." He told me that it is too time consuming to apply mulch. It is easier to just weed the areas and spot check as needed. As I worked in different areas of the garden it became apparent that this was an issue in all the various zones of Arnold. The issue wasn't an ethical one, but a matter of manpower and time. Luckily for the Hort Techs they do have a few interns with them over the summer and can play a bit of catch up and do some mulching when time presents itself. Arnold can be a hectic place to work at times, and you get a true sense of pride when the Hort Techs thank you for your assistance on projects, because you come to understand how much work they have to accomplish.

I spent the summer at Arnold and it is hard for me to pick out a truly bad experience. If I had to pick something it would have been mowing the formal garden and that was only because the design makes using mowers an extremely tedious task. There was no real way to remedy the problem. It is just as difficult to choose a best experience, because there were so many. I really enjoyed getting to learn new things. I learned to weld, operate a tractor, a chainsaw, and a plasma cutter. I did all these things with the most patient and helpful staff you could ask for.

The qualities of a good intern are the same qualities one would look for in a future employee. Punctuality was definitely Andrew's biggest pet peeve. A good intern should be honest, hardworking, available, and always willing to do whatever needs to be done. A person who can work independently will find life easy at Arnold. The staff wants you to know what needs to be done and do it. Just be honest and open and it will be recognized.

Andrew definitely looks for the hardest and best workers in the group of interns. Andrew referred to me and another intern, Robert, as "Southern Comfort." That's because Robert is from Virginia and I'm from South Carolina and we always talk about the South. Gossip around the work place is that we were the most sought after of all the interns because we were the hardest workers in the group. I don't know if that's true or not, but it feels good to know they want you around. My strength lies in that I am willing to do anything. That is also my weakness. Sometimes I get in over my head and don't want to admit that I'm in trouble. I feel that I can get along with most people I encounter and I don't take myself too seriously. I feel that I also need to work on my botanical terminology. I sometimes have difficulty trying to describe what I need someone else to understand.

This summer was a great experience that I will never forget and always cherish. I am truly grateful to have had this opportunity, but this Fall I must return to school to finish my degree. I still don't know what I want to do with my Horticulture degree, but I know I am heading in the right direction. I am really interested in graduate school. The Agriculture Education program at Clemson really interests me. I have also thought about doing another internship in Europe or the West Coast. No matter what route I choose I know that the faculty and staff at Clemson University and Arnold Arboretum have set me up for success in whatever path I choose.

