

Year 2 Summary Report

Native American Undergraduate Museum Fellowship

Introduction

The Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) Native American Initiatives (NAI) department received a three-year grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for their Native American Undergraduate Museum Fellowship program. MNHS contracted with Wilder Research to conduct interviews at the end of each year and to compile the results into a summary report. These end-of-year evaluations gather feedback about program impacts, as well as ways in which MNHS can improve the fellowship program. For the Year 1 evaluation, we conducted interviews with the fellows. In Year 2, we conducted interviews with fellows, internship supervisors, and fellowship mentors. This summary report presents findings from the Year 2 interviews.

The fellowship is a 10-week paid program, including 3 weeks of seminars and workshops and a 7-week internship. In addition, fellows have an assigned mentor for the duration of the program (this was added in Year 2). The fellows who participate in this program are current undergraduate students or recent graduates of a four-year postsecondary degree program. The fellowship is open to students and recent graduates throughout the United States, with the majority of fellows coming from Minnesota.

Year 2 was intended to be carried out during summer 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the second year of the fellowship was postponed to summer 2021. These fellowships were designed to be in-person; however, to ensure the safety of all those involved, the fellowship was moved to a virtual format. The final week was the only in-person component of the Year 2 fellowship. Prior to Year 2, the program experienced staffing and leadership changes. In terms of staffing, the program increased staff capacity to design and deliver the program. Additionally, prior to Year 2, MNHS hired a new director of its NAI department. Lastly, in Year 2, MNHS staff implemented a mentorship component to the program, which fellows in Year 1 suggested as a way to improve the program.

Wilder conducted 14 semi-structured interviews (5 with fellows and 9 with internship supervisors and fellowship mentors). Year 2 interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom or phone. The fellow interview protocol remained largely unchanged from Year 1 to Year 2; however, questions were added about their experience with a mentor. The supervisor and mentor protocol was created with MNHS input to complement the fellow interview protocol. Interviews lasted from 20 minutes to an hour. The interview findings are summarized in this report and direct quotes from those interviewed (in blue text) are used to illustrate key points.

Reasons for being a part of the fellowship

When asked why they wanted to be a part of this fellowship, all of the fellows saw it as a way to connect to their undergraduate major in a professional setting.

There are a lot of internships for history majors and not anthropology majors. When I was reading the description, I saw it said anthropology/archeology majors and usually in museums it's history major.

Three fellows saw the fellowship as an opportunity to get real-life experience working in a museum, to gain a better understanding of how a museum works, and to learn more about the wide array of museum professions. Fellows also noted the fellowship was an opportunity to reaffirm or examine their interest in a museum career. Additionally, two of the fellows noted they were drawn to the internship because it was designed for Native American fellows and led by Native American staff.

[I]t was Native American space, I prefer to be in an Indigenous setting.

Fellows were also asked about their goals for participating in the program. Three main themes emerged: cultural professional development, relationship and network building, and skill and knowledge development.

Mentors and supervisors, on the other hand, said they got involved because they saw a connection between their work and the NAI department, and saw this experience as an opportunity to help strengthen this connection. Two of the supervisors noted that this experience elevated ideas and experiences from communities that their work focuses on. Serving as a mentor or supervisor gave them more access and insight into these communities that they did not have before.

Some of my interest working on this and getting a fellow was to help out a young person and get some help getting into the Native American community that I have limited access to on my own.

Six supervisors and mentors mentioned that they got involved in the fellowship because they identify as members of the BIPOC community and understood that the program wanted fellows to have connections to BIPOC staff at MNHS. Those staff also said that having BIPOC people in these roles was really important for the program because it allowed fellows to “see themselves” in institutions like MNHS. In addition, many of the mentors mentioned the current work they are doing at MNHS to establish a mentorship program for BIPOC staff. These staff saw their participation in the fellowship as an opportunity to learn more about how a BIPOC mentorship program could work at MNHS.

I think for me it's really important to have Indigenous people in these spaces, but also for young Indigenous students—those who are still in college—to see themselves reflected ... [W]hether it's higher education or museums, they need to know there is a space for them.

Supervisors and mentors also said they felt passionate about participating because of the meaningful impact that their own mentors or supervisors had on their lives. Supervisors and mentors mentioned they had the desire to “pay it forward” to these fellows by helping them understand both formal and informal structures that make up the culture of an institution, acting as a connection to other people and areas of MNHS, and supporting fellows during and after their time in the program.

I have been so grateful to all of my mentors at MNHS and [wanted to] pass that forward, as well as get to know some amazing fellows.

Both supervisors and mentors noted that they wanted to make lasting connections with the fellows, and that this was as an opportunity to learn from the fellows and see what new ideas and perspectives fellows bring to MNHS.

Experience in the program

Overall, fellows gave positive ratings on their experience in the program (Figure 1). The majority of fellows rated the three-week seminar and the compensation they received as “excellent.” Additionally, when asked what they liked best about the program, many noted the seminar portion. Fellows also noted that they really enjoyed being able to be taught by and interact with NAI staff throughout their time in the program. Getting information and materials in preparation for the fellowship was rated slightly lower, with two responding “fair.”

1. Fellows: How would you rate the following aspects of the Native American Undergraduate Museum Fellowship Program (n=5)

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
The application process	1	3	1	--	--
Getting information and materials in preparation for the fellowship	2	1	--	2	--
The three-week museum seminar	4	1	--	--	--
Your 7-week internship	2	3	--	--	--
The final in-person week at MNHS ^a	3	--	2	--	--
Help with housing arrangements and other logistical assistance from MNHS, such as travel help	2	1	2	--	--
The compensation you received for this fellowship	4	--	1	--	--
Opportunities to interact with the other fellows	2	3	--	--	--
Opportunities to meet and interact with other museum professionals	2	--	3	--	--

^a This measure was added in Year 2 due to the virtual nature of fellowship.

Fellows saw the program as helpful in developing professionally and deepening their understanding of the relationship between museums and Native communities (Figure 2). All the fellows noted that the program helped increase their awareness of different types of employment options in the field (which many fellows noted as a reason for applying), as well as deepen their knowledge specifically about the role of museums in educating about the cultures and histories of Native American communities and tribes. When asked what they liked best about the program, fellows noted the opportunity to network to build their connections both inside and outside of MNHS.

2. Fellows: Please indicate the extent to which the Native American Museum Undergraduate Fellows Program helped you with the following things (n=5)

	Helped me a great deal	Helped me a little	Did not help me at all
Build my professional skills like communication and team work	2	3	--
Increase my awareness of different types of employment options in the museum field	5	--	--
Build my skills and resume to be a strong candidate for a museum job	3	1	1

2. Fellows: Please indicate the extent to which the Native American Museum Undergraduate Fellows Program helped you with the following things (n=5) (continued)

	Helped me a great deal	Helped me a little	Did not help me at all
Increase my professional network and connections in the museum field	4	1	--
Improve my understanding of the role of museums in preserving history and culture of Native American communities and tribes	4	1	--
Deepen your knowledge about the role of museums in educating about the cultures and histories of Native American communities and tribes	5	--	--

Supervisors and mentors had a similarly positive experience serving in their roles for this program, and felt supported when necessary by NAI staff (Figure 3). One area NAI should focus on in the future is ensuring supervisors and mentors get information regarding their roles and responsibilities up front.

3. Supervisors & mentors: How would you rate the following aspects of the Native American Undergraduate Museum Fellowship Program from your perspective?

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
Getting information from Native American Initiatives staff regarding your duties and expectations as a supervisor/mentor (n=10)	1	3	2	4	--
Getting support, as needed, from NAI staff regarding how to best support your supervisee or mentee (n=10)	4	2	3	--	--
For supervisors: The overall experience having a fellow do an internship in your department (n=5)	4	1	--	--	--
For mentors: The overall experience of serving as a mentor to a fellow (n=5)	1	4	--	--	--

Many supervisors and mentors saw the fellowship as an opportunity to get involved in helping MNHS meet its goals related to engaging with Native American communities (Figure 4). For most supervisors and mentors, the fellowship helped them deepen their knowledge about the role museums play in educating about the cultures and histories of Native American communities and tribes. Lastly, nearly all supervisors and mentors said that this experience helped them at least a little in learning how to effectively support a museum fellow.

4. Supervisors & mentors: Please indicate the extent to which the Native American Museum Undergraduate Fellows Program helped you with the following things (n=9)

	Helped me a great deal	Helped me a little	Did not help me at all
Learn how to effectively support a museum fellow	3	5	1
Improve your understanding of the role that museums can play in preserving the history of Native American communities and tribes	5	3	1

4. Supervisors & mentors: Please indicate the extent to which the Native American Museum Undergraduate Fellows Program helped you with the following things (n=9) (continued)

	Helped me a great deal	Helped me a little	Did not help me at all
Deepen your knowledge about the role of museums in educating about the cultures and histories of Native American communities and tribes	4	5	--
Get more involved in helping MNHS meet its goals related to engaging with Native American communities	9	--	--

Both supervisors and mentors enjoyed working with and getting to know the fellows, often because the internship felt more like a collaborative working relationship due to fellows’ established skills and knowledge. Mentors noted they enjoyed building connections and acting as a “sounding board” about the day-to-day experience of working in a museum. Additionally, this experience gave supervisors and mentors the opportunity to see how other departments in MNHS run their internship programs.

Impacts

Impacts for the fellows

We asked fellows how their experience with the program might impact them in the short term (1-2 years out) and long term (5-10 years out). Short term, fellows saw the fellowship as a continuation of their schooling and preparing them to pursue more schooling in the future if desired. Fellows also noted that the fellowship was an opportunity to get real-life experience working in a professional setting, which helped reaffirm their desire to become a museum professional. For one fellow, this experience allowed them to reaffirm a career in the field.

[B]eforehand, I wasn’t interested or passionate about Native representation in museum work-- because I always assumed it was bad from what I had seen. Seeing how there are organizations and Native people who have a good say in certain things ... made me reevaluate working in the museum field.

Fellows also noted that the seminar, the internship, and mentorship helped them build skills like interviewing, writing, and communicating in a museum setting. The fellowship also provided them with resources and experiences that will be helpful for future jobs and internships. Fellows also said that the knowledge they gained on decolonization of museums, such as about the North American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and the repatriation movement, had an impact on them, piquing their interest in their potential career path. Some fellows noted that the fellowship increased their knowledge around preserving Native American cultural history, which influenced them to continue to advocate for Native voices and cultural representation in the field.

A big thing we learned about was NAGPRA. ... [W]ith that update, hopefully, there will be more ways for tribes to get their things back ... but there are places in the world, [not] just in the United States, that aren’t willing to give things up and I’d really like to be able to help out on the advocacy side of that.

One of the most crucial impacts for the fellows was the strong professional connections they made. Fellows talked about how much they enjoyed the opportunities to network with professionals inside and outside of MNHS. This is a big difference from the Year 1 evaluation, where fellows noted a lack of networking opportunities. Fellows

valued the connections they made while in the program and predicted these connections would last. Specifically, fellows pointed out how much they valued the connections that they made with Native museum professionals.

I have reached out to one of the [guest speakers we had] and they provided some resources to me. I know a lot more people in the field because of the fellowship. Based on the connections I have, I feel comfortable reaching out [to them].

I think it's going to impact my career just because of the connections that I've made and having the resource of MNHS in my back pocket to continue doing research, create a project of my own, to reach out to different communities with their help.

Supervisors and mentors saw similar impacts, such as learning about the variety of career paths in the museum field, building connections and networks, and developing skills and knowledge related to working in a museum. Supervisors and mentors believed this program could help fellows see themselves working and belonging in institutions like MNHS. They also believed the fellowship gave fellows an equity lens on how to look at museums and how they can help work towards decolonizing practices in museums. Lastly, supervisors and mentors hoped that fellows will bring the skills, connections, and knowledge they gained from the fellowship back to their communities.

I hope that education and awareness empowers them to interact with museums in new ways and to be agents of change within museums or whatever field they go into. One of the tenets of these fellowships is to talk about things through an equity lens. I would hope that fellows leave with ideas on how to apply that in a professional setting as they embark into their own professional careers.

These are colonial, predominately White institutions. There is a lot of healing to be done at places like MNHS. I hope that programs like these fellowships are stable enough to provide a foundation for our fellows that to confidently say, 'I am an expert in this field. I belong here and I am going to help push it forward in the present and future.'

Impact on the Minnesota Historical Society

Fellows saw this program as a positive initiative from MNHS and hoped that more institutions around the country would implement similar programs. This program helped fellows address stereotypes and prejudices they had of Native representation in museums, made the MNHS a welcoming and safe space for fellows, and increased the understanding of how institutions can connect and learn from Native communities. Additionally, fellows said that the program helps increase the visibility of Native American people working in museums, which could help usher in more young Native American people into the program and field.

MNHS has a commitment to increasing diversity and inclusion in their organization and this program does that. They could even expand this to be a nationally recognized program.

Supervisors and mentors also noted the positive impact the fellowship program has on MNHS as an organization. They said that the program helps MNHS work towards reparative and equity efforts through gaining more diverse voices and perspectives in many areas of their work and expanding MNHS's connections to Native communities. Additionally, supervisors and mentors said that the fellowship program reminds staff of the relationships both past and present between MNHS and Indigenous peoples. Like the fellows, supervisors and mentors saw the program as a potential model in the field for Native American museum fellowships. Lastly, supervisors and mentors frequently talked about the hope that this fellowship program and programs like it would help hire and retain Indigenous staff and staff of color. Supervisors and mentors said that fellows left the program with good feelings about MNHS, which could help encourage them to pursue a career at MNHS.

[The Native American Undergraduate Museum Fellowship (NAUMF)] has been one of the greatest aspects of our work that directly leads to employment opportunities being filled by alum. We don't have anything else that is like that, where you can see the correlation of people who have been exposed and participated in the fellowship and then being employed. To continue that is so important to diversifying MNHS and moving forward with culture change and inclusion at MNHS.

Additionally, supervisors and mentors expressed hope that the fellowship program could lead to identifying and understanding the shared goals between departments and foster relationships due to the intersection of those shared goals. They said that they hope that the fellowship program will set strong standards for how departments in MNHS can and should collaborate with others. Supervisors and mentors also said that this fellowship is an important mechanism by which MNHS engages with Native communities in Minnesota and the Midwest region.

For our department, we could and should engage more in the future in programs like this with NAI. ... [O]ur department as a whole could do a lot more to engage with [NAI] more.

[I]t also shows tribal nations our dedication to preserving Indigenous history, but preserving it in a way that also keeps Indigenous people in mind. Allowing indigenous youth and students and elders be the storytellers, rather than the museums telling their stories on their behalf.

Suggestions for program improvement

From the fellows' point of view, they saw most room for improvement around the application process. For example, fellows noted they would have liked clearer directions on how to get letters of recommendation to the program, which is similar to what the Year 1 fellows suggested. To make the application more streamlined, Year 2 fellows suggested have an "upload" button or "drag and drop" option within the application portal, so that materials like the letters of recommendation could be easily submitted. Fellows noted that having the essay questions up front on the information page would have been appreciated as well. Additionally, fellows said they would have appreciated a confirmation email when the letters of recommendation had been received and when all application materials were submitted.

Fellows also suggested the program provide materials used throughout the duration of the program in hard copy, as well as digital form, prior to the start of the program, including more detailed descriptions of and communication about their internships. Year 1 fellows also wanted more communication about their internships prior to beginning the program. Fellows felt that the program can improve by provide more training at the beginning on how they will be expected to use electronic tools and resources (e.g., Google Drive), as well as how to navigate MNHS's internal tools, like the library system.

Regarding the in-person portion of the fellowship, some fellows said that they wanted multiple breaks throughout the day, as well as some personal time without anything planned. Additionally, during the evenings, fellows would have appreciated more planned activities that promoted relaxation and bonding among fellows (e.g., bowling or visiting amusement parks).

Lastly, fellows suggested that the program find ways to ensure that those in leadership positions are present for activities for the duration of the program, including during the internship period. This is similar to a recommendation from the Year 1 evaluation. Fellows suggested that a supervisory team from NAI and other departments at MNHS could be formed to help monitor the internships and ensure that staff are treating interns appropriately and carrying out their job effectively.

Both supervisors and mentors offered suggestions for improving the program, primarily around improving the structure and guidelines for these roles. Mentors, especially, noted a lack of training and resources for how they should fulfill their role. For example, mentors said that they would have appreciated clear expectations or guidelines about what being a supervisor or mentor entailed, information about the application process and how fellows were selected, a training or orientation session for supervisors and mentors prior to the program starting, and weekly

meetings with supervisors and mentors throughout the program to talk through any issues or learn different ways to support their fellow.

In all, better communication as a whole. Once the program got started it was phenomenal to hear about what the fellows were learning and all the people they were meeting, but I felt out of the loop at the beginning. It would have been nice to have had an introductory meeting to talk about the fellowship program; I went online and read everything that was published online for applicants.

Supervisors and mentors also noticed burnout among the fellows and recommended some ways to help avoid or reduce burnout through self-care resources and guidance, which could be useful in fellows' professional careers as well. Lastly, supervisors and mentors suggested that fellows have opportunities to gain experience in multiple departments and learn more about day-to-day activities performed by departments (that is, not just focusing on their internship project).

Future relationship building with Native American tribes and communities

When asked how MNHS could build strong relationships with Native American tribes and communities through this program, fellows recommended MNHS should proceed slowly and with a solid awareness and acknowledgement of MNHS's history with Indigenous communities. These recommendations were similar to what was reported in the Year 1 evaluation report. It was also suggested MNHS should invite tribal elders and council members to MNHS to tour collections and get an understanding of how MNHS works, and also share their own or their community's goals with MNHS.

Supervisors and mentors mentioned that, generally, there are poor relationships between Indigenous communities and museums, including MNHS. Supervisors and mentors said that programs like this one can help organizations "do better" in terms of relationships and respect with Indigenous tribes and communities; this program shows investment on MNHS's part through time, staff, money, and other resources to improve those relationships. One respondent said the fellowship can "help heal those things we [MNHS] haven't done so well in the past."

Additionally, supervisors and mentors noted that the fellows will be bringing skills, knowledge, and relationships to their tribes that will hopefully positively impact their communities. They said that they hoped the fellowship will create more opportunities in the future for collaboration between institutions and Indigenous communities and that these communities are welcome at MNHS.

The fellows had conversations about decolonizing museums and what that might look like. They got to meet with different scholars and people within the cultural heritage field like tribal heritage. They got to have a really good look at the way museums interact with cultural heritage on multiple levels. Nothing but good can come out of that kind of critical engagement with the field of cultural heritage.

I think about the various Native Nations that were represented in the fellows ... [T]hose fellows all took back a lot of expertise and connections and networks with them. That will help them and their Nations advocate for their cultural heritage. Sometimes museum pit their experts against communities, and the academic expert museum staff is valued at a higher level than the lived experience and knowledge of Indigenous communities. The fact that these fellows have done the readings [and that] they have the language to meet museums on a level playing field will be beneficial to their communities.

Moving forward

These interviews provide useful information regarding the successes of the program and suggestions for refinement in the future. Overall, the fellows, supervisors, and mentors enjoyed participating in the program.

Below are suggested recommendations for the Native American Undergraduate Museum Fellowship as it moves forward:

Supporting fellows

- Provide enough NAI staff support for fellows, supervisors, and mentors throughout the program.
- Have leadership schedule consistent check-ins with fellows for intentional engagement. Additionally, have leadership be upfront with fellows about how much time they will put into the program to manage fellow's expectation of the leaders.
- Provide training on expectations for fellows regarding the use of electronic tools and resources (e.g., Google Drive).
- Work on updating the application portal with more features to streamline the application process, especially adding attachments. Additionally, have a confirmation email that applicants receive once their materials and recommendation letters have been submitted.
- Provide clear and descriptive information about internship placement and project descriptions prior to the start of the fellowship.
- Provide printed and digital materials to fellows prior to the start of the program.

Supporting supervisors and mentors

- Provide guidelines and clear expectations for mentors on what is involved and expected from them in these roles.
 - Consider creating a guidebook that describes the roles and expectations of supervisors and mentors.
 - Consider hosting an information or orientation day for supervisors and mentors learn about the program.
- Ensure supervisors and mentors have the resources they need to successfully carry out their responsibilities.
 - Provide supervisors and mentors with the syllabus and other resources that the fellows get so that they can follow along with the program.
- Look for ways to work with participating departments to get more involved in the fellowship; this could be planning the fellowship, identifying internship projects or being on the selection team for the applicants.
 - Mentors and supervisors noted how fun and exciting some of the speakers and trips sounded; consider inviting supervisors and mentors to the speakers or events.

Work with participating departments to identify barriers that prevent people from going into specific areas of the museum and ways in which the departments can work together to encourage fellows and address those barriers during the fellowship

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