My Summer as a Researcher and Archivist
at Pepperdine University

This summer I was a research assistant for Pepperdine University’s history professor Dr. Stewart Davenport, and also served as an intern in the Pepperdine University Archives and Special Collections under Katie Richardson. Pepperdine University is a small liberal arts institution located in Malibu, California. For Dr. Davenport, I was given the responsibility of researching difficult-to-find passages, quotes, and pictures for his book *Sects and Sex*. In the archives, I was tasked with organizing a collection of scripts and also identifying and describing audio and visual files for processing. I chose these two endeavors in order to ascertain what career path I wanted to pursue with my history major.

To begin the internship with the University Archives, I was thrust into the role of cataloguing a newly-donated collection. I began by learning the proper procedure in Archival Sciences. I was taught how to properly handle, sort, and label different items. Most importantly, I learned how to describe the materials after they were sorted and labeled. The purpose of an archivist is to make a researcher’s job easy, so providing a clear and accurate description is important. In order to demonstrate these newly-
Tanner Potts 2

Summer 2014

I learned skills, I was asked to sort and describe the Donald G. Ingalls Collection of Scripts. Don Ingalls was a screenwriter in Hollywood from about 1950 to 1980. He wrote for TV shows such as Star Trek, Bonanza, and Fantasy Island. This collection (detailed in this release by the archives “http://library.pepperdine.edu/news/index.php/2014/05/intern-to-process-donald-g-ingalls-collection-of-television-scripts/” and the final copy of the collection found here“http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8ms3w0x/admin/#ref92”) was small compared to others in the archives, but was still very difficult to work on. I learned how to use the software, Archivist’s Toolkit, in order to organize and complete the finding aid for this collection. After this collection was finished, I spent my time at the archives applying Audiovisual items for digitization. The State of California offers grant money to digitize cassettes, VHS, and film reels if they contain historically significant material. Pepperdine had a large collection of speeches that I was able to submit for this grant. These included speeches by Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and even Hollywood stars like Charlton Heston and James Stewart. This project was extremely enlightening as I actively preserved the history of my home state. In the end, I submitted 50 outdated audiovisual items to be digitized by the state.

For Dr. Davenport, I performed the duties of a research assistant. He was already beginning the first draft of his book, so most of my responsibilities were retroactive researching and finding media for the book. For the first weeks, I compiled a
list of pictures that could be used in the book. In order to do this, I had to research specific databases, libraries, and copyright laws in order to find publishable photos. This research was extremely worthwhile as I prepare to write my own thesis in the fall. In addition, I created an original map for this book. This included downloading and learning how to use photo-editing software. Finally, I helped to find some obscure quotes for the book and even wrote research reports on some of the books my professor had not read yet.

The most important lesson I learned from this internship was how much a 9-5 job affects you. With travel time and performing my football workouts on top of my job, I was exhausted by the end of the day. I had to prioritize when and where I spent my time. It was a great lesson in time management. I also learned that in order to attain the career that I want, I would most likely need to pursue graduate school. I was lucky enough to have some great supervisors during my summer internship. In the archives, Katie made what seemed like a monotonous task into an interesting one. I learned that all sorts of organizations have archivists. Not only do universities and museums need archives, but organizations like the National Football League and Major League Baseball have large archival staffs. This was great to learn as it widened the scope of jobs that I expected to find. With Dr. Davenport, I was able to have meaningful conversations about pursuing a Ph.D. in history. While I have a passion in this field,
after speaking to a young professional in this field like Dr. Davenport, I realized that finding a job would be near impossible. I would need to pursue a six-year degree then face the daunting job prospects. Dr. Davenport told me that I showed real talent for research and writing, as he read over my reports and my thesis proposals. However, he advised that unless I was given a full scholarship, a doctorate would not be worthwhile. As we talked, he suggested going to law school. With a law degree, I could still become a professor and stay connected to a college, while still having flexible career options.

By the end of this internship, I became discouraged about pursuing a career in history. Instead, with the help of my advisors, I have narrowed my career aspirations. In the spring, I was convinced that I would go on to get my Ph.D. in History. While this dream is not off the table, I now believe that I will attend law school in order to maximize my career options. With a J.D., I could teach or practice law, or pursue any other career in which the critical thinking taught in law school is valued.