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My internship at Monticello was two fold. Each intern is assigned to a manager, who will be your contact for just about everything you do during the internship. As an intern you will be responsible for giving tours of the house three days a week and for the other two days, you will be working on your independent project given to you by your manager. When I was offered an internship by Monticello, I had no idea what to expect. I'm a History major, so I felt like it was right up my alley. I was far from a Jefferson expert, though, so I was also nervous. But I quickly realized how unnecessarily worried I was.

Monticello internships start early in the summer, around the middle of May, and that's because you go through a weeklong intensive course that prepares you for giving tours and for working at a historic home. They even provide a Jefferson 101 course as well as other lectures that are basically as informative as your average history 101 classes. Beginning on the first day, you are immersed in a dialogue with history. This conversation with Jefferson's life and legacy will continue guiding you throughout your internship and even after. From the moment you begin meeting the staff and other interns in the department, you feel at ease. Everyone is truly connected by a common goal and you feel it immediately. Not only is everyone passionate about history and Thomas Jefferson, but they are also passionate about bringing history to life and about the never ending quest for knowledge.
The first thing you tackle is preparing your own tour. At first, this was an extremely daunting challenge. I did not feel as if I had the information or the authority to craft a tour that I then had to give to complete strangers. I just knew that my first group was going to demand a refund, or even worse, that during my run through with my manager, I would be asked to go home and practice again. But of course the information is all there. It was already given to you during your week of training. You even saw how other people used that information when you shadowed numerous tours. It was all just a matter of gaining the confidence to present it to guests. As a history major, I have struggled greatly with attempting to discuss primary source resources because I simply did not think I had the authority to make those points. But at Monticello, you are constantly told that you know more about Jefferson than most people you will encounter on tours. That combined with the fact that you learn more about history every day that you work, made me feel that I could say those things without being questioned or questioning myself. On your tour, it is as if you are the premier Jefferson scholar. I am sure that the confidence I gained discussing history this summer will be invaluable to me as a historian.

On the other hand, my project days were much slower paced. It is an independent project and since you are not in the house, you will not be able to enjoy the other guides. Initially, I was a little confused about my project, but it ended up being very fulfilling. I was able to design a competition completely on my own that would allow children to engage with history and Jefferson from home. I am still excited about the project I did because I left Monticello knowing that I not only
learned so much but I that I was also able to help, that I was valuable in some way. The project (we hope!) will run annually in the summer beginning next year. Even if it is not seen to fruition, though, I will still feel as if I accomplished something during those days. I gained a great sense of pride through designing my own project and then seeing it through independently.

There is also something to be said about the environment of Monticello. I do not think there is any place that makes learning new and challenging things more comfortable than there. Everyone I met genuinely wanted to help and to share and discuss. Every single day I learned something new. The managers, supervisors, and other guides are a wealth of knowledge. The amount of quotations they could recite and, in general, the amount of information they knew was astounding. It was also inspiring. I worked with some of the most interesting people I have ever met and probably will ever meet. There was a man who attended MLK’s "I Have a Dream" speech, one who worked as a top secret engineer for NASA during the Cold War, a woman who had lunch with The Beatles, a world renowned Geologist, and many, many more. I learned as much from these fine people as I have from my many college courses, as well as some things that you cannot learn in a classroom. I learned one of the most important things in life during my time at Monticello: how knowledge, like Jefferson believed, truly is power and how all of us should never stop seeking it. I had many goals for my internship with Monticello, but the one I did not anticipate was feeling as if I had a part in continuing the legacy of one of the greatest minds this nation has ever produced. To put it simply, I fear the rest of my summers may be very dull by comparison.