2018 Upstate Institute Summer Field School Fellowship

**Title:** Hands-On Programming at the Utica Children’s Museum

**Community Partner:** Utica Children’s Museum

Research on best practices of children’s museums across the county with an opportunity to create and assess local programming in Utica, for any student interested in research and child development.

**Project Description:**
A Field School Fellow will work with the Utica Children’s Museum to research age-appropriate hands-on programming for museum visitors. The research will consider how other children's museums structure programs that are attractive to a diverse audience, and how the Utica Children’s Museum can design programs that engage children from a wide range of ages, educational backgrounds, and abilities. Finally, the project will look at ways the Museum can best assess their programs, besides tracking the number of visitors who participate. This research will be completed through contact with similar institutions and by reading about best practices available through museum literature and resources from the Association of Children’s Museums, the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums, and the American Alliance of Museums.

The Museum also would like to have a better idea of what the community would like to have provided for them at their facility. To do this, the Fellow will create and analyze community surveys conducted on social media to seek public input about programming.

In keeping with the Museum’s mission, the Fellow’s work will combine research and hands-on activity. With assistance from staff, the Fellow will design and run a series of programs over the summer to augment the Museum’s summer offerings and to test ideas gleaned from research. In addition to this practical assessment, the Fellow will try out means of visitor assessment employed by other children’s museums to explore their viability. At the end of the Fellowship, the Fellow will leave a series of activity plans; each plan will include a discussion of the activity’s education objectives and suggestions for assessment materials.

Research into early childhood education has shown that play provides the framework for all higher learning. The mission of the children’s museum is to make opportunities for productive free play available to children throughout the community. Providing activities and programs to accompany their exhibits enhances the opportunities for educational play. It also offers guidance to parents about the kinds of activities they might want to engage in as a family that will be beneficial to their children’s development.

**About the Community Partner:**
The mission of the Utica Children's Museum is to offer an environment that supports every child's natural curiosity to learn through hands-on, play-based exploration. Our primary target audience is children from birth to age 10, with a secondary service goal of educating older children and adults through exhibits that feature natural history, local history, STEAM, and early childhood. We are in the process of transforming the Museum into a hands-on, fully interactive destination.

The Utica Children’s Museum strives to be accessible to everyone in the community; they have reduced-price admission for families who receive various forms of public assistance and for veterans’ families. They are also designing new exhibits with full accessibility for children with special needs. One of their newest exhibits is the Sensory Zone for children ages three to six, designed for children with ASD and sensory processing disorders and children with special needs, in addition to “typically” abled children.
**Required Skills:**
This position might be particularly interesting for a student preparing to be a teacher, but that is by no means a requirement. No specific skills are required for this Fellowship, other than curiosity and a desire to explore and create fun. Enjoying the company of children is a necessary requirement. The Fellow will refine their research skills on materials that are generally outside the demands of college courses, will have a chance to think creatively and analytically, and will get an inside view of museum operations.

**Logistics:**
This is a full-time paid research position (35 hours per week) to last approximately 10 weeks, conducted under the joint supervision of the Upstate Institute and Utica Children’s Museum. Steve Bulger, the Managing Director, and Helen Schwartz, Chair of the Board of Trustees and a former museum professional, will provide direct supervision. The intern will work at the Museum on Thursday and Friday of each week, and from Colgate’s campus on Tuesday and Wednesday of each week. Field School Fellows receive a research stipend of $4500 plus reimbursement for any costs associated with transportation for this project. A car is not required for this project, but may be helpful. A Fellow will need a U.S. drivers’ license to complete this work.