

A Chance to Learn Together

Established in 1998, the Indigenous Student Museum Internship (ISMI) program offers First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students a paid 16-week internship at the Royal Alberta Museum (RAM) to further develop their career goals in the fields of cultural and natural heritage. Every summer, a group of interns gains hands-on experience working in the field or behind the scenes — actively learning from and contributing to the Royal Alberta Museum. From directly supporting the increased use of Indigenous languages in the museum to archeological support on

dig sites, participants in the ISMI program have the opportunity to make a lasting impact on the Royal Alberta Museum while gaining experience that supports their future careers.

The program, a partnership between the Friends of Royal Alberta Museum Society and the Royal Alberta Museum, has created new links between the museum and First Nations communities. It has enabled the RAM to implement one of the key recommendations made by the landmark Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples issued by the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association: training First Nations peoples “in all phases of museology.”



Skye Haggarty (ISMI 2019 & 2020) creates a pattern from a coat

Since ISMI was established, over 50 Indigenous post-secondary students have worked at the Royal Alberta Museum on projects related to their fields of study. They have pursued their intellectual passions, learned professional skills, served as ambassadors for the museum — and contributed immeasurably to the museum’s curatorial and educational programming, as well as to conservation and collections management.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The Indigenous Student Museum Internship program is guided by four goals:

1. To introduce Indigenous students to the world of museums. Internships expose students to the wide variety of activities in which museums are involved, and to the wealth of opportunities that museums offer.
2. To support Indigenous students in their educational endeavours. Each intern works with a member of the museum staff to design a project that draws on the intern’s own interests and gives them a chance to develop skills that will prove useful in their field of study.
3. To encourage the museum’s use as a cultural resource for Indigenous people and to build constructive partnerships with Indigenous communities.
4. To provide financial support through paid internships to Indigenous students in post-secondary studies, in disciplines across cultural and natural heritage, such as archaeology, botany, geology, Indigenous studies, and history.

BENEFITS TO INTERNS

Sixteen weeks of intensive work in the RAM have a tangible, and often profound, effect on interns' lives and careers. Upon completing the program, many have decided to pursue careers in the museum field or additional post-secondary degrees. In the last few years, some ISMI interns have had the opportunity to be hired by the Royal Alberta Museum to continue projects they started during their internship.

The ISMI program, in short, has played a significant role in encouraging the educational and professional aspirations of young Indigenous students, as participants have attested:

Photo courtesy of Royal Alberta Museum.

"The most rewarding job I've ever had"

*Working at the museum in the Indigenous Studies department has connected me with my upbringing, to traditional teachings and knowledge of Indigenous crafts. I came away from the program with a better sense of direction about what I want to do and with more confidence. — **Skye Haggerty***

*If you're interested in working in a museum, you're going to get so much out of the ISMI program. The environment is one where questions and discussions are encouraged. It's a good learning experience that I wouldn't have gotten anywhere else. — **Maria Nelson***

*While working for the Royal Alberta Museum's botany program, I acquired so much experience in the botany field, which is what I will be studying in university ... The summer internship program is incredible. Working in a learning atmosphere just makes me want to keep learning more. — **Cherie Island***

*Through the ISMI program I was given the great opportunity to apply the knowledge gained from school to the work field. I have acquired new knowledge and skills, which will be valuable in my future courses and future aspirations. — **Pamela Campiou-MacDonald***

*My internship has been the most rewarding job I have ever had. I learned a lot more about Aboriginal people and have strengthened my pride in my heritage. I also got to do research in areas that apply directly to my career in anthropology. The experience I gained here will take me far in the future. — **Terry-Lin Fedorus***

Support and Creative Input: Benefits to the Museum

The museum and its projects have also benefited enormously from the ISMI program. Over the past two decades, interns have catalogued and helped store newly acquired artifacts, supported the collection of oral histories through short films, and organized National Indigenous Peoples Day events. They have participated in archaeological excavations, curated small displays, and taken part in research projects geared toward developing displays for the Alberta History Hall.

Interns have also suggested creative directions for curatorial research and created new links between the museum and First Nations, both during and after their internships. For example, museum staff met a number of Elders, educators, and political leaders from the Cold Lake First Nation while working on a photo identification project initiated by an intern with family connections to Cold Lake. A former intern, who went on to work with Native Student Services at the University of Alberta, arranges field placements for Indigenous students. A third intern, who has finished her education degree and now teaches, makes the museum a regular destination for her students.

Finally, the program has helped to change attitudes. Several interns came to the museum with a negative perception regarding the role of museums as keepers of Indigenous heritage materials. Each left with a new appreciation for the work that museums do, an understanding of the museum as a place that welcomes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, and recognition of the museum as an important resource for Indigenous communities.



Chauntelle Atcheynum (ISMI 2017 & 2018)
works with kids in the Children's Gallery.

Support the ISMI Program!

FRAMS is committed to the longevity of the ISMI program as a way to contribute to a process of reconciliation. For over 20 years, FRAMS is proud to look back at the over 50 individuals that have benefited from their experience working at the Royal Alberta Museum and have gone on to make a difference in their communities.

You too, can ensure this impact continues. If you, your company, or organization are interested in learning how to support the Indigenous Student Museum Internship (ISMI) Program, please contact our office at:

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