

AS A NATIVE Hawaiian, I was fortunate to have been able to participate in the REU-NSF program during both the Spring 2006 and Spring 2007 semesters. This program allowed us to take classes at the University of Pennsylvania and gain valuable experience in conducting research. My research project involved working with *kapa*, or bark cloth, and learning techniques to clean, repair, and preserve it. I also learned how to create housing units for artifacts that I can now use to help preserve my own people's prized possessions.

While the Penn Museum's Hawaiian collection is fairly small compared to its other collections, it has some items that are valuable to Hawaiian culture. Among these are the *lei niho palaoas*, or human hair and whales' tooth necklaces, and the large *ahu ula*, or Hawaiian feather cape—both of which are symbols of Hawaiian royalty.

One of the amazing aspects of the REU program was the opportunity it presented for some of us to educate other

members of our own culture. In my case, I was able to revise some of the Hawaiian artifact labels (that were originally written in the 1970s from the perspective of the colonizer) to correct spelling mistakes and historical inaccuracies.

The REU program also introduced us to "Six Directions," a Penn Native American interest group under the auspices of the Greenfield Intercultural Center. This connection allowed the REU students to play a part in the planning process for the All-Ivy Native Conference that Penn hosted during the spring of 2007. As a result, everyone who attended the conference was also able to hear Manulani Meyer, a noted Native Hawaiian educator, speak in the Penn Museum's *Dialogues Across Indian Country* series on "Ho'ea Ea: Returning to Freedom—Hawaiian Epistemology and the Triangulation of Meaning." Similarly, during a presentation at the Greenfield Intercultural Center, Gail Makuakane-Lundin, the Director of Native Hawaiian Student Services at the University of Hawaii, shared her expertise on how to indigenize a university campus.

These are just a few of the many wonderful experiences I have had thanks to the REU program. And the friends I have made at Penn have become lifelong ones. As a Native Hawaiian it is customary to acknowledge those who have been instrumental in our endeavors. Therefore, I would like to thank Janet Monge for the inspiration that created this program, her unending support, and for always being there. Thanks are also due to Valarie De Cruz, Director of the Greenfield Intercultural Center, for her guidance and help in making us feel at home in Philadelphia, to Ginny Green, the Museum's Senior Conservator, for her time and patience in teaching me the skills I have acquired, and to Jeremy Sabloff for his hard work behind the scenes. Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to Lisa Gemmill, for being a wonderful emotional support and friend, and to Sonya Ashley, who was an inspiration when things got tough, my lunch and dinner buddy, and the person with whom I spent many days exploring Philly and all it has to offer. 🏠



Herbert Poepeo works on his REU project.

Janet Monge

SITTING ON A couch on the first floor of one of Penn's dormitory high-rises, the REU students waited patiently for the last student to join us for lunch. The night before, I had walked out of Philadelphia's airport hoping to see snow, but was slightly disappointed that there was none. With

just the winter wind blowing through the super block of dormitory high-rises, I realized it was colder than I had expected. What would this place and its people offer to my interests in Native American studies, art history, and anthropology?

The answer was *more than I had expected*. There were random experiences, such as walking aimlessly with my equally inquisitive friend Rico Worl, as well as inspiring interaction with peers, teachers, and scholars. For me, the REU program was a combination of academic freedom set in a unique urban cultural experience that stimulated thoughts about being a Native person and applying that knowledge to research.

My research on “Visualizing the Native Renaissance, Part 1: Shelley Niro” helped me discover myself. I spent most of my time at the Penn Museum, surrounded by the belongings of Native people and immersed in research about our Native people. It was moving to participate in such an environment. It became part of my existence while I was there. I dreamt about my research, agonized over the process, found inspiration everywhere, and connected with people I respect—all of which became part of the learning process that I carry with me today.

The five months in 2005 that I spent in Philadelphia reignited my passion for Native contemporary art and its social issues relating to Natives today. Penn’s staff and faculty were very accommodating, encouraging us to attend lectures and conferences that allowed us to engage with a diverse mix of people. Amid our school workload, we met with Russell Thornton, a UCLA Professor of Anthropology; Mateo Romero, an artist; Sherman Alexie, an author; Wilma

Mankiller, the first woman chief of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma; and befriended “Six Directions,” the Native American student organization, with talk of “knowing” how to make frybread. Our education through the REU program was special. It showed mutual respect in cultural understanding and was a perfect culminating experience for my undergraduate years.

It has been nearly three years since my arrival in Pennsylvania and I continue to work in the arts and culture field, expanding my knowledge into development and marketing. As for the connections I made in Pennsylvania, I continue to meet my friends in locations around the country, continuing our experience where we left off. 🏠

REU STUDENT SONYA ASHLEY

LIKE MY FRIEND Herbert Poepeo, I was fortunate to participate in the REU program twice (2006, 2007). Having just graduated from the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, I came to Philadelphia never having seen a museum collection before. I will always remember my first reaction—astonishment and fear. As a Navajo woman, I stared at the ages-old Native objects stored in the Museum’s Mainwaring Wing and

remembered my grandma’s warnings to never touch these things. Among the Navajo it is said that to touch these objects may bring you the bad luck or illnesses of the object’s deceased owner. Staring through the glass windows at the objects in the collections, I thought, “How am I going to do this?”

Fortunately, after much reflection and some searching through the Museum, I found the *Na a’tlo*—Navajo string games that had been collected by the Museum’s first Director, Stewart Culin (1892–1903). Shaped into various forms—animals, constellations, and insects—I was intrigued to learn more about them, but most importantly, they were covered in plastic and fastened to cardboard—Perfect!

To my surprise, my REU project became more than just a learning experience for



Nanibaa Beck (purple coat) poses with the other members of the first REU group in 2005. Standing from left to right, Robert Preucel, Rogette Esteve, Janet Monge, Sarah Green, Utsav Schurmans, Rico Worl, and Andrew Pederson. Crouching next to Nanibaa is Lauren Sankovitch.



Sonya Ashley displays part of her research project. "The REU program offered more than an opportunity to improve my research skills. It offered an opportunity to learn with my family, as I explored the Museum collections with my mother, and it allowed me to open my heart and mind to Native elders as they spoke of education, perseverance, and strength."

me—it was a community effort sparked by my research questions that led me to discuss stories, traditions, and philosophies with my family and friends that would never have come up in our normal conversations. It opened a doorway of communication. I was soon overwhelmed with cultural stories, personal accounts, and perspectives on Navajo traditions, and was surprised to find that many people do *want* to teach their cultural knowledge. It was an amazing learning opportunity for me, both academically and personally. Instead of being shy about asking questions, I have grown to understand the importance of asking these questions now.

During the Summer of 2006, I spent many days braving cell phone charges to chat with Herbert. Although the program was over, we continued to discuss our own Native experiences and ideas, and through Herbert, a Native Hawaiian, I became more aware of my connection to Indigenous People on a global level and not only to the Natives of North America. It was our friendship and my curiosity that encouraged me to apply to the program a second time.

My second REU experience was great. I showed the new participants around Penn's campus and the city and enjoyed

Philadelphia's Mummer's Day Parade. More importantly, this time I was more aware of my cultural limitations in handling the objects. Inspired by the work of Larry Aitken (an Ojibwe tribal historian and an amazing storyteller), Tim Powell, and Louise Krasniewicz (both Senior Research Scientists at the Museum), I investigated digitization as a solution for cultural limitations in museums. My final project took the shape of a website concept that used digital images as a means for cultural education.

Like the previous semester, I greatly enjoyed attending events, dinners, lectures, and exploring Philadelphia. My most poignant moment, however, was learning from

Larry Aitken. His eloquent teachings helped me understand the dynamic relationship between people and objects, and inspired me to understand the cultural concepts of objects and their purpose. His presentation of ideas of educational renewal based on traditional values gave me hope for new directions in Indigenous cultural education.

Today, I continue to be intrigued by Indigenous museum collections and their cultural implications. One day, I hope to make a career helping people to connect with their past through museum exhibits and collections.

I continue to be grateful for the opportunity to participate in the REU program at Penn. Besides engaging in a unique cultural exchange—hearing the experiences of a variety of Natives—I learned how to nourish myself culturally without the immediate presence of home and how to put ideas into action. For the first time in my life, I felt intellectually empowered. This learning experience has personally affected me. I formed lasting friendships and would like to extend my sincerest appreciation to Penn's staff, the REU participants, and the Museum guests that made this program so truly special. What I learned here, I will carry with me forever. 🏠