

Report of internship (August – October 2010) at Sydney Observatory
By Jodi Heasman, Masters of Museum Studies student, University of Sydney

In brief, my project at Sydney Observatory was to review and edit all current internal and external signage at the site and propose new signs if needed. This required liaising with a multitude of staff at the Observatory, as well as at the Powerhouse Museum. Once this was completed, I assisted with the editing of the Interpretation Strategy for the Fort Phillip Signal Station. In addition to these two main projects, I also helped with the installation of the 'Winning sky photos: the David Malin awards 2010' temporary exhibition, front desk duties, and went on a night tour.

My main project, signage, required a lot of reading and consultation with Observatory staff. Some of the facts on display were outdated and incorrect (one even suggested we still have nine planets!), and required changing. Retired astronomer, Dr Nick Lomb provided amendments to the text of the signs and most of the staff had opinions as well that required reviewing and/or inclusion in the new signs. I sourced new images from the NASA website and also the Australian Telescope National Facility website. I had to measure all the signs with and without frames, as well as translate the word 'welcome' into several different languages for the entrance signs. This was a real project based task that required input from Powerhouse Museum and Observatory staff – designers, curators with specialist knowledge, and those with access to high resolution images were consulted several times in the process. In particular Melanie Cariss, Janine Roberts and Jean-Francoise Lanzarone provided advice and assistance.

One of the signs was converted into two framed images that were displayed on art easels. I spent an afternoon fiddling with stainless steel wiring and swages to secure the frames to the easels to prevent them from falling over or being stolen. I also helped with the installation of the temporary signage for the David Malin temporary exhibition. These signs were vinyl which needed to be stuck on the walls and required a lot of patience and measuring. These two tasks really opened my eyes to the variety of roles in museums and showed me that no two days are ever the same when working on a project!

The second, much smaller, project was working on the Interpretation Strategy for the Fort Phillip Signal Station. This was only completed in draft form so with Toner Stevenson, Manager of Sydney Observatory, we worked toward seeing it finished. It was really interesting investigating the history and significance of the site, and even better to walk around the Signal Station and discuss possible ideas for exhibitions and activities in each of the rooms. I mainly relied on James Kerr's conservation plan for Sydney Observatory but also used some information researched by previous interns and consulting groups. This has not been finished, but it was a great experience to be a part of a bigger plan for the site.

My internship experience at Sydney Observatory was a great way to enhance the skills learned in class, and also to learn skills that cannot be taught in a classroom. My supervisor, Toner Stevenson, provided a rare insight into the management and administration side of museums which is something that I grew more interested in as time went by. She provided ample opportunity for me to experience all aspects of Sydney Observatory and I really appreciated the extra care she took to make sure that I also got something valuable out of the internship. It was a rewarding experience and I look forward to applying the skills I developed into any internship or job in the future.