

Sixth College Practicum: Experiential Pedagogy, Innovation, and Experimentation at The Birch Aquarium at Scripps Institute of Oceanography

The CAT 124 Sixth Practicum, *Museum Interactive Exhibits and Technology at Birch Aquarium at Scripps Institute of Oceanography*, is the first major course collaboration the Aquarium has had with the main campus. Sixth College has been at the forefront of creative and experimental research and practice with the Birch Aquarium at Scripps in addition to the Practicum http://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/feature/birch_fellows_create_immersive_experience_for_new_r_v_sally_ride_gallery

The Sixth Practicum course focused on discovery, exploration, experimentation, and innovation. Sixth College students engaged in new ways to explore art, science, and technology as they collaborated with an interdisciplinary research team at the world-renowned Birch Aquarium in a groundbreaking initiative to make museum more interactive and exciting! Scripps' new project, "The Expedition!" will extend over a two-year period starting this year. The Expedition!, a highly interactive exhibit, will feature an expedition staging area, a polar habitat, a laboratory similar to those on Scripps' vessels and instruments that are used across varied lands, down deep in the seas and high up in the air.

The Aquarium aims to educate, but to do so in an entertaining way that captures the imagination and inspires, while simultaneously conveying the core scientific mission of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography. Scripps Aquarium - a forward thinking organization was the students' client, who wanted to explore alternatives or extensions to the present "science museum" style. The Aquarium wants to think about new possibilities for what a trip to the aquarium might become. Sixth College Practicum Director, Dr. Diane Forbes Berthoud, who developed and oversaw the course development and implementation, remarked: "This initiative epitomizes the Practicum program that seeks to engage students in active, innovative, and experimental research and practice with community partners."

Sixth College students learned the roles of speculative designers, working directly and collaboratively with Scripps Institute for Oceanography staff, listening to their concerns, problems, and creative ideas, then adding to those with prototypes of future exhibits. On December 6, 2016, Sixth College students presented their portfolios of various designs, realized prototype displays and a collection of ideas for the near future of the Aquarium. Dr. Harry Helling, the Aquarium's new Executive Director, remarked at the high quality and professionalism of the students' work, which rivaled that of experienced professionals with whom Scripps has collaborated. Visual Arts Professor Brett Stalbaum, the course instructor, stated: "Guiding a project like this is equal parts providing practical and intellectual resources, and just giving a bright and curious group of students the permission and encouragement to explore the possibilities and let it be fun and so many people at Birch and SIO are excited to share their worlds! It was a welcome environment for ideas and discussion, and that has led to these well-informed design proposals." Other members of the instructional team were Drs. Cheryl Peach and Dale Stokes who supported students in their design and innovation efforts. Dr. Stokes said it was a very successful course to which he looked to doing more of the same, expanding the experience in the future. He remarked that one of the most satisfying things for him was "to interact with an enthusiastic, creative group of students who were able to bring a unique perspective to communicating marine science to the public."

Practicum student, Mercedes Luangamath, wrote to the Practicum Director: "The best way to describe my experience as one of Birch Aquarium's design interns was profound. Collaborating

along with my peers and mentors enabled myself to learn and engage new skill sets that I never knew I had. This class was an amazing experience, I am thankful again that you were part of this great journey to establish this opportunity.” Her fellow collaborator Proud Heng remarked: “This was a fun and memorable quarter getting behind the scenes at the Birch Aquarium to design and propose our own exhibits to bring SIO's amazing research to the public! I'm very grateful for this Practicum; it was an exciting learning experience working with such passionate and creative people, touring SIO labs and science museums, and playing around with design and game development!” Other student reflections were: “I had a blast! The entire course was very stimulating and not only encouraged, but also forced critical thinking. This allowed us to start from scratch and conceptualize, design, modify, and present our ideas in a unique manner that was purely our own...every idea, model, layout, and creation was conceived from our own minds and we had to fine tune and sharpen these ideas each week to create an actual product to present.” said Nicolas Osborn. “This was an incredible opportunity to team up with folks from many fields and backgrounds. I greatly enjoyed learning about design processes and applying that to real world situations. This class was an amazing experience, and we're very grateful to have been a part of it!,” said Quartz Clark.

We, at Sixth, are proud to collaborate with the Birch Aquarium at Scripps Institute of Oceanography and such talented and innovative students and the Birch leadership team! To learn more about the Expedition! click here

<http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/2016/jan/21/scripps-expeditions-birch/>

