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6-27-2019

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Recommended Citation

Communications and Marketing, "Writing Her History: Michelle Brownlee '18" (2019). *Campus News Archive*. 2778.

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Writing Her History: Michelle Brownlee '18

Brownlee becomes the youngest collections assistant in Chicago Field Museum's Anthropology Dept.

Michelle Brownlee '18, Turtle Mountain Ojibwe, is the youngest collections assistant in the Field Museum's Anthropology Department. The University of Minnesota Morris grad is putting her liberal arts education to work on indigenous representation at the museum.

Brownlee says her research on campus helped her land an internship at the Field Museum. That internship later turned into a full-time job.

Brownlee works in the Field Museum's Anthropology Department. Specifically, she works on the Native North American Collections. Right now she's renovating Native North American Hall, which hasn't been revamped in more than 60 years.

At UMN Morris Brownlee was able to get real-world experience in her field. Combining her anthropology and Native American and indigenous studies majors, Brownlee researched how US museums were collaborating with indigenous peoples to ensure collections were respectfully and accurately reflecting their histories and cultures. She also helped Associate Professor Rebecca Dean catalog a new collection of Native artwork.

When Brownlee finished her degree, she heard about a job opening at the Field. With an internship and her senior capstone project under her belt, she already had the experience doing exactly what the position was all about. The rest, as they say, is history.

"It's pretty cool to see my research topic in action on a much larger scale," she says.

Brownlee says UMN Morris gave her not only skills and experience necessary for her current position, but also strong, supportive relationships that have lasted beyond graduation.

"I left UMM with close relationships with several professors who are extremely supportive and have done a lot to help me get to where I am today. I am very grateful for them," she says.