

**Organization Name:** The Mercer Society, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) support organization partnering with Mercer Botanic Gardens

**Location:** Mercer Botanic Gardens 22306 Aldine Westfield Road, Humble TX 77338, 713-274-4160

**Website:** <http://themerchersociety.org/> and <http://www.hcp4.net/community/parks/mercer>

**Mission:** The Mercer Society, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit support organization, assists Mercer Botanic Gardens by organizing and implementing activities that encourage membership support, expand community awareness and raise funds for the continued enhancement of infrastructure, programs and collections.

**Title of Internship:** Herbarium Research: Preserving the Past for the Future

**Internship Overview:**

What is a herbarium? It is a collection of pressed, dried and mounted plants and plant parts. These are stored on acid-free paper in climate and pest-controlled cabinets. Mercer Botanic Gardens herbarium, registered as MERCA in Index Herbariorum, a global directory of herbaria and staff, includes plants of east Texas, rare eastern Texas species, permanent sample sites that include Harris County saline prairies, and specimens from Mercer Botanic Gardens living collections. In the spring of 2017, the herbarium collection at Mercer will grow from approximately 5,000 to about 50,000 specimens with the long-term loan of a collection from the Robert Vines Environmental Science Center and Arboretum (Spring Branch Science Center) herbarium, registered as SBSC in Index Herbariorum, an important collection documenting the flora of the Houston metro area and East Texas.

**Core Responsibilities:**

- Report to the Mercer Botanical Center staff botanists
- Document and catalog plant specimens; log data into computer software; review, print, and attach labels to vouchers (mounted plant specimens); organize and store various plant family vouchers
- Assist staff botanists: pack, ship and unpack stored herbarium specimens
- Maintain the plant specimens and apply up to date identification and current nomenclature
- Communicate with herbarium specialists on best practices for handling vouchers
- Assist with development of an educational display case and an herbarium and botanical library outreach flyer
- Review details for future image scanning and online access of collection
- Communicate professionally with Mercer Botanic Gardens staff and professional partners, The Mercer Society, volunteers, and the visiting public at Mercer Botanic Gardens
- Access the onsite botanical library, online resources, and personal experiences of others to research current information
- Participate in the Mercer Botanic Gardens Student Research Symposium

**Job Dimensions/Other Requirements:**

- Intern must enjoy working in an office setting as well as outdoors.
- Intern will participate in Shell internship programs, attend Lunch Bunch presentations, summer workshops and other events.
- Intern will travel from Mercer Botanic Gardens to the Mercer Botanical Center research building (0.4 mile, one-way) on a regular basis. All other necessary travel will be facilitated through the supervisor.
- Must be available: June 14 – August 9, 2017; 40 hours per week, worked primarily Monday – Friday with flexible dates/hours for college requirements; 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. with a 30-minute lunch. Some weekends may be required.
- This is an eight-week, paid internship, with funding provided by the Shell Nonprofit Internship Program. The stipend for the full-time internship period is \$2,500 (subject to FICA and income tax withholdings).

**Community Impact/Outcomes & Deliverables:**

- Educational tools will be made available to the public to encourage confidence in working with plants and identifying and researching local plant populations.
- The herbarium is available as a research tool for universities, colleges, botanical institutions, the horticulture industry, citizen scientists and others.
- It is also open to students and used for training classes for citizen scientists and supports the training of high school students for the Texas Envirothon Organization program, botanical education classes and Mercer's monthly luncheon lecture series.

**Student Qualities/Experiences Desired/Qualifications and Requirements:**

- Familiarity with plants/botany, knowledge of Microsoft Office, highly proficient research and writing skills, and experience working with volunteers.
- Applicants must be currently enrolled, full-time, undergraduate students who will be returning to college as full-time sophomores, juniors, or seniors in the fall of 2017. Full-time enrollment is defined as 12 or more credits in one semester. When applying for the internship, the student must provide The Mercer Society with written enrollment verification from the college confirming the student's enrollment status. Student ID cards and/or phone calls are not sufficient documentation. Official enrollment verification must come from a university's registrar office.
- May occasionally, as needed, lift up to 40 pounds and work outdoors in heat, humidity, rain, cold and dust.
- A background check and drug screening will be administered by Harris County Precinct 4 prior to hiring.
- Family members of The Mercer Society staff and/or board and family members of Mercer Botanic Gardens staff are not eligible to be hired as Shell interns.

**Learning Objectives/Educational Benefits:**

- The intern will learn how to communicate professionally with coworkers and their professional partners as well as with volunteers and visitors while working in the garden. The intern will develop strong time management skills to keep tasks moving forward. Operating equipment such as microscopes with cameras, scanners, and copy machines will also be taught during this internship. The intern will develop the ability to work successfully within a team.
- The intern will learn about the impact of environmental health and societal health and sustainable practices.
- The intern will gain an understanding of the functions of working in a public facility and the non-profit sector with hands-on participation in day-to-day operations and special events.
- The intern will work alongside other potential interns to produce and present the Mercer Botanic Gardens Student Research Symposium, by preparing PowerPoint presentations and public speaking to a varied audience.
- The program endeavors to promote critical thinking, independence, self-confidence, perseverance, and group working skills.

**How to apply:**

- Please email a résumé and cover letter to Anita Tiller (atiller@hcp4.net) and Suzanne Chapman (schapman@hcp4.net).

**Final Thoughts:**

- The goals of The Mercer Society and Mercer Botanic Gardens is to connect people with plants and to instill a love of nature and our role as inhabitants and stewards of our environment.
- Herbarium specimens provide sources of DNA for use in studying taxonomy and the relationship between plants. They help to document changes in the distribution of vegetation over time and, in turn, help track changes in climate.