



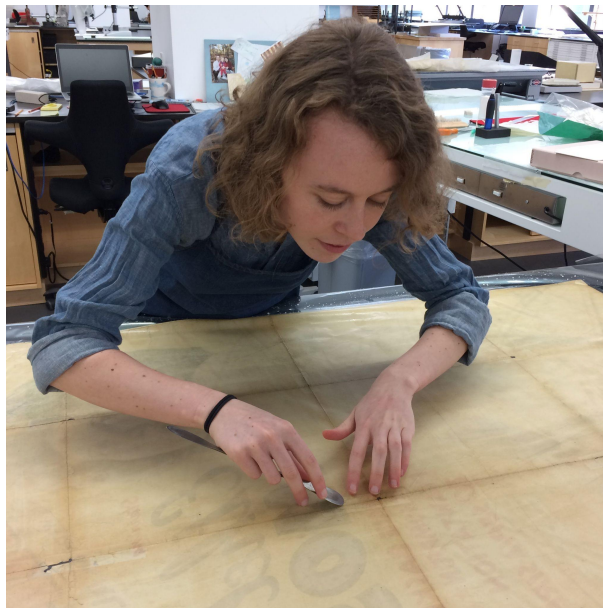
Emerging
Conservation
Professionals
Network

Get to know the ECPN Graduate Liaisons

Spotlight on NYU

This latest ECPN Outreach series highlights the Graduate Liaisons in the [ECPN Liaison Program](#), who facilitate the flow of information about their particular graduate programs from their perspectives to you, their fellow emerging conservators. Whether you're pre-program or a graduate of a different program or specialty, they are here to help!

This interview highlight is with **Emma Hartman**, ECPN NYU Liaison and current second-year fellow specializing in paper and photograph conservation. Continue reading for Emma's personal insight into NYU, graduate school, application tips, and valuable resources from this impressive emerging conservator!



Emma assisting with the treatment of a poster at the New York Public Library (Photo: Denise Stockman).

The Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, is a four-year art conservation program during which students earn both an MS in the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works and an MA in the History of Art and Archaeology. In the first year, students focus on learning historical methods for artmaking and materials science principles through lectures, labs, and reconstructions. During their second year, students select their specialty from modern and contemporary, time-based media, objects, paintings, paper, photographs, or library and archives and begin hands-on treatment courses. The fourth and final year is a nine-month internship at a museum, institution, or private practice. The NYU program [website](#) has a wealth of information regarding their programs, entry requirements, and information about students and professors. If you have additional questions and don't want to cold email a program administrator, please reach out to Emma at nyu.ecpn.liaison@gmail.com.

Outreach Officers' Burning Questions:

1. What resources (articles, websites, data, books, etc) were most helpful to you while preparing for graduate school?

This may be too obvious for this audience, but #1 was definitely ECPN! The ECPN community, particularly the [Facebook group](#) and [webinar series](#) answered a ton of my early questions when I was starting to explore the field. Professional relationships were also completely essential. I learned the most about preparing for graduate school through conversations with supervisors, alumni, current students, and fellow pre-programmers. I'd encourage ECPs to start forming a professional network as soon as possible--consistent support and advice from mentors and peers in the field played a major role in my early professional development.

2. What is a tool or material that you use every day/most often?

I am a very big fan of the Paper Perforating Pen, an amazing gadget that book and paper conservator Grace Owen-Weiss developed using a modified nose hair trimmer, a sewing needle, and a mechanical pencil. It is a fabulous tool for creating perforated lines in paper, which create very precise torn edges. It's perfect for making mending strips and detailed contoured fills for paper treatments, and anyone can make one with a few inexpensive, readily available supplies! See the BPG Wiki for Grace's [illustrated step-by-step instructions](#) to make your own.

3. What has been your favorite treatment/project you have completed at NYU (or pre-program)? Why?

I haven't started my treatment coursework yet at NYU, but pre-program at the New York Public Library, I worked on several cased daguerreotypes, which was super fascinating. Cased daguerreotypes are composed of so many different materials (glass, leather, wood, textiles, and, of course, metals) and thus require treatment strategies that are sensitive to their composite nature. I really enjoyed the range of skills and techniques we drew on to treat different aspects of the plates and their cases, and examining daguerreotypes under the microscope was so much fun—they have such dynamic and complex surfaces.

4. What has been the biggest challenge for you at NYU?

While the coursework at NYU is certainly challenging (in a great way!), the biggest challenge is definitely living in NYC on the graduate fellowship stipend. While possible, it is difficult. At NYU, there are definitely plentiful opportunities for graduate student employment, but these often don't amount to significant supplemental income. I've been able to make it work with careful budgeting and several roommates, but it's important to note that I was privileged to have come out of undergrad with no loans or other major financial obligations, which made graduate study in this program feasible for me.

5. What has been the biggest highlight for you at NYU?

The highlight is absolutely the community at NYU. My cohort (Class of 2024!) has been an amazing source of mutual support and motivation during a year of hybrid learning and the core faculty, Conservation Center staff, and the larger network of conservators and scientists who teach at the Center have all been extremely supportive. There are so many conservation professionals based in New York, and many of them engage with the Conservation Center community in some capacity. I'm so looking forward to a few more years working closely with such curious, dynamic people!

6. How do you feel your experience at NYU differs from other conservation programs/What does NYU do differently from other programs in art conservation?

The curriculum at NYU is distinct from other programs in a few important ways. The first is its focus on art history: students in the conservation program complete an MA (including a thesis) in art history alongside our MS in

conservation. This means we are often writing rather substantial art history papers in addition to usual conservation assignments. Also, the program is 4 years rather than 3. This is a great way to get to know potential future colleagues in art history, as we take many classes alongside them. The second difference is the structure of the first year. Students do not complete any treatment work during this year, and instead focus entirely on learning historical methods for making art and artifacts while completing a complementary materials science course. This involves lectures, labs, historical recipe reconstructions, and close looking at study collection objects. In the second year, students begin hands-on treatment courses in their chosen specialty.

7. Has NYU arranged networking for future job/internship opportunities? Are alumni involved with hiring/networking?

It's important to note that I entered the program during the pandemic, so I can only speak for this period of hybrid learning. That said, NYU advisors were very actively involved in helping me secure a summer placement that aligned with my goals, and in securing additional summer funding. There are also many NYU alumni in the NYC area, and many of them teach at the Conservation Center in some capacity. During non-pandemic times, there are also frequent evening lectures and events that are open to the larger community. All of these are excellent opportunities to network and get to know alumni.

8. Do you have any advice for applicants/pre-programmers?

Over the past few years I've come to understand that there really isn't a prescribed path for entry into graduate school. There is no magic combination of pre-program internships that guarantee a spot in one of the programs, and in such a small field, it's impossible to predict how competitive the application cycle will be in a given year. The results depend on so many factors beyond your control, and it's important to learn how to manage rejection, especially in a field this small and competitive. With that said, it's critical to stay curious, seek out support and feedback from mentors and peers when you need it, and don't discount other work that you've done outside of conservation—chances are it gives you unique perspectives and skills that will make you a better conservator.

9. How many times did you apply to graduate school and what do you feel was the strongest component of your application?

I applied once, to the programs at NYU and Winterthur/University of Delaware, and, frankly, I don't think it's possible to say with any certainty why my application in particular was successful. I will say that I majored in art history and chemistry as an undergraduate, so I had completed significant upper-level coursework in both subjects, which I think was an asset. By the time I finally felt ready to apply, I had also worked full-time in conservation for two years and had spent a year on a research fellowship studying conservation in Delhi, India. Because of the competitive nature of the programs, I had been extremely nervous to apply for fear of failure, and I didn't attempt to apply for several years after I had completed the prerequisites. I'd encourage ECPs to carefully balance their level of preparedness with such fears of rejection. While I wouldn't change a thing about my path to graduate school, in hindsight, fear shouldn't be a major determining factor!

10. If you could change anything about the application/requirement process, what would it be?

I believe this has been said many times before, but I think the GRE should be eliminated from the application. It's extremely expensive, and I don't feel that the time and expense applicants incur preparing for and taking the GRE is worth the extra data point in an already extensive application package. I also think that programs could be more imaginative when it comes to what counts as "pre-program" experience (though, it's important to note, NYU does not require pre-program conservation experience). While it's important that applicants are familiar with conservation as a chosen profession (one needs to know exactly what one is committing to in entering this field!), there are so many other jobs that will give applicants skills that they'll use in conservation. Many of these changes have been implemented to some extent during the Covid-19 pandemic, but I hope the field continues to move in this direction.

Thank you so much, Emma, for your time and generously comprehensive answers that share with all of us your experiences at and leading up to NYU!

Readers, please continue to let us know your thoughts and send any questions you have to us or our Graduate Liaisons. Reach us at ecpn.aic.outreach@gmail.com

Bio

Emma Hartman (she/her) is a graduate fellow at the Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, where she's specializing in paper and photograph conservation. She received her BA in Art & the History of Art and Chemistry from Amherst College, and held internships in conservation at the Brooklyn Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and in private practice. After college, she spent a year based in Delhi as a Fulbright-Nehru Fellow, studying histories of manuscript conservation in India, and two years as a conservation technician at the New York Public Library. Outside of conservation, she enjoys experimenting with fiber arts, baking, and engaging with climate justice initiatives.