



Emerging
Conservation
Professionals
Network

Get to know the ECPN Graduate Liaisons

Spotlight on Queen's

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 highlight is an interview with **Grace McLean**, current student and Queen's University Liaison, to discuss her experiences within her graduate program, during her time as a pre-programmer, and her career goals.



Grace McLean is a second year Master of Art Conservation candidate at Queen's University, specializing in Paper treatment. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Art History with a Fine Arts minor in darkroom photography from Mount Allison University in 2019. She completed pre-program internships at the Owens Art Gallery in Sackville, NB and the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick. Her areas of interest in conservation include alternate process and colour photography, works of art on paper, and paper textiles.

The Queen's University Master of Art Conservation, is the only one of its kind in Canada. It offers two streams - a two-year research program with no treatment component and a two-year treatment program. Graduate students of both streams are awarded a Master of Art Conservation (MAC) and choose between the specialties of paper, paintings, artifacts treatment, or conservation science research. You can read more detailed information about the Queen's program, entry requirements, and current students on their website here [<https://www.queensu.ca/art/art-conservation>]. If you cannot find the answers to your questions and don't want to cold email a program administrator, please reach out to Grace at qu.ecpn.liaison@gmail.com.

Scroll through the questions and answers below for information about Grace and her valuable insights into the art conservation graduate program at Queen's University!

Outreach Officers' burning questions

1. What resources do you consistently reach for during graduate school courses/when approaching treatments?

The **Book and Paper Group (BPG) Wiki**, a collaborative publication through the American Institute for Conservation (AIC) and BPG, is an amazing resource as someone in a paper treatment stream. It is a great starting point on a wide range of materials and treatments, and most pages have extensive bibliographies for further reading. **Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) Notes** are frequently my 'go-to' for topics related to preventive conservation.

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

Low-acyl gellan gum, a rigid polysaccharide gel, has been a useful material for controlled moisture delivery with minimal impact on paper substrates. It is simple to prepare, and is mostly transparent, allowing for observation during treatment. I have personally used it for backing removal and stain reduction, but it has other applications such as deacidification, and delivery of enzymes and some solvents.

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

My favourite treatment that I have completed at Queen's (so far!) was a panoramic silver gelatin photograph c. 1925. It was a valuable learning experience, as it required a broad range of treatment steps. Matching the tone and gloss of the photograph for in-fills was especially laborious, but fun!

4. What has been the biggest challenge for you at Queen's?

The biggest challenge during my time at Queen's has been adjusting to changes made in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been very lucky to have access to our labs, though this is now limited by the lockdown in Ontario. We have had to alter the way we approach internships and exams, but our faculty and staff have been extremely helpful and supportive during these strange times! Despite the obstacles that the pandemic has created, I am thankful for the online resources that have emerged as a result. Our program has organized some amazing virtual guest lectures and workshops this year in lieu of in-person events, and I was able to attend AIC's 2020 Virtual Annual Meeting which would not have been accessible to me otherwise, due to the cost and time commitment of travel.

5. What has been the biggest highlight for you at Queen's?

I have learned so much at Queen's, but one of the biggest highlights for me is how tight-knit we are because the Master of Art Conservation program is so small. Graduate school is inherently challenging, and having such a close built-in support system is wonderful, especially with the increased isolation we have all been facing this past year.

6. How do you feel your experience at Queen's differs from other conservation programs/What does Queen's do differently from other programs?

It wasn't until becoming the ECPN Liaison for Queen's and connecting with the liaisons from other conservation programs that I realized how different they all are! The Queen's structure - entering into a stream of study in paper, paintings, or artifacts treatment, or conservation science research from the outset - is something that I appreciated, as I was specifically interested in paper conservation pre-program. Queen's also allows you to dive into treatments during the first year, which I recently learned is not true of all conservation graduate programs!

7. What would you most like ECPs to know about your school/chosen track/specialty?

Queen's is unique as it is the only Master of Art Conservation program in Canada. This past June it was announced that Queen's will be establishing the Bader Chair in Art Conservation, which will allow the program to update its facilities and expand to include a stream of study in imaging science which will complement the existing streams in painting conservation, paper conservation, object conservation, and conservation science.

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

One thing that I highly recommend is getting in touch with conservation professionals with a range of specializations and backgrounds. It is more difficult to visit labs in-person right now, but communicating via email or video calling is still valuable! Speaking with practicing and retired conservators in my area really helped confirm my interest in conservation, and created a network of people that I still feel comfortable reaching out to for advice. If you are not sure where to start, the **Canadian Association of Professional Conservators [directory](#)** and **AIC's Find a Conservator [tool](#)** are both helpful!

Another piece of advice – if you are applying for a position somewhere that has a conservation lab, don't be afraid to mention your interest in conservation! One of my pre-program conservation internships unexpectedly resulted from applying to a student archivist position.

That last bit of advice is SO important, Grace! Conservators come from so many backgrounds and have such varied skill sets, it's common to see a conservator come at the field sideways, from a tangential field or seemingly unrelated profession, as opposed to head on with some kind of boxed set of required coursework and experiences. Thank you for reminding everyone that there's no "right" way to get here. And thank you so much for your time and thoughtful answers. We appreciate you being involved with ECPN from Canada and being an amazing resource for ECPs everywhere!

Readers, stay tuned for February's highlight and, as always, please let us know what you think of these - are there questions we aren't asking that you'd *love* to get answers to? Are they helpful?

Thanks for engaging with this and reach out to us if you have questions or need an *in* to the Network! All best to all of you in this first month of 2021.

- Your friendly neighborhood Outreach Officers