



Emerging
Conservation
Professionals
Network

Get to know the ECPN Graduate Liaisons

Spotlight on Buffalo

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 **Abby Schleicher**, ECPN Buffalo Liaison and current second-year student specializing in paper conservation. Continue reading for Abby's personal insight into Buffalo, graduate school, application tips, and valuable resources from this impressive emerging conservator!



Abby surface cleaning a brass rubbing on tracing paper in graduate school

The SUNY Buffalo State, Garman Art Conservation Department, is a three-year Master of Arts program that prepares students for careers as professional conservators. During their second year, students select their specialty of paper, objects, and paintings, and may even choose a subspecialty in ethnographic or archaeological objects, photographs, or books. The first two years of the program involves intensive course, laboratory, and studio work. The third and final year is a year-long internship at a museum, institution, or private practice. Graduate students earn a certificate of advanced study in art conservation along with the M.A. degree. The Buffalo 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 Abby at bsc.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?

While preparing for graduate school, I definitely kept up to date on the [AIC Community's DistList and forums](#). While not a hardcopy resource, I would definitely recommend being active in the [ECPN group](#) and staying connected with regional liaisons. The most valuable resource for me has been the mentors and colleagues who I was able to ask for advice, discuss conservation and share different experiences about the graduate application process. For articles, I'd definitely recommend the **Journal of the American Institute for Conservation (JAIC)**. Since I was very interested in paper, I looked at **The Book and Paper Annual** frequently. I also used the **AIC Guide to Digital Photography and Conservation Documentation** by Dan Kushel, Warda, and Heller. Part of my job as a pre-program technician was to do all the imaging for the studio, so the guide was very useful.

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

For identification of paper artifacts, I often consult "How to Identify Prints" published by Bamber Gascoigne and "The Digital Print, Identification and Preservation" by Martin C. Jurgens. When writing treatment reports and examining artwork, I like to reference articles and books about standard verbiage for the conservator in an effort to be clear and consistent with my writing. I often reference "Descriptive Terminology for Art on Paper" by Nancy Ash, published by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It's currently available online as a pdf! I also frequently reference **Paper and Water** by Irene Brückle, which is essentially a textbook for paper conservators that we read in our 2nd year at the Garman Art Conservation Department at Buffalo.

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

I often find myself using a Japanese tool made out of bamboo called a Hera. I really like using it for lifting edges of paper. It can also be used for scraping, burnishing, splitting boards, and delaminating paper from mount boards. I use it for almost everything! I also have a set of tweezers I really love for mending papers.

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

I haven't completed it yet but I am really excited about my 695 Masters Project, essentially my masters thesis, which is the research and treatment of a watercolor from the 1860s. The paper is heavily discolored with different types of media applied that present a challenge when planning the treatment. I've loved investigating the different types of pigments and selective glaze that was used through scientific analysis by gathering data with instruments such as XRF (X-Ray Fluorescence Spectroscopy), FTIR (Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy), FORS (Fiber Optics Reflectance Spectroscopy), Radiography and Multimodal Imaging. After working at a private practice, I really appreciate the amount of time we have to research and learn about each of our projects in graduate school.

5. What has been the biggest challenge for you at Buffalo?

I wouldn't say it was a challenge particular to Buffalo but I really struggled with a school-life balance. While it was really important for me to do well and learn as much as I could in graduate school, I really ignored all the other aspects of my life. I think the pandemic helped me to reevaluate my goals for graduate school and also take care of my general well being, focusing on exercise and mental health.

6. What has been the biggest highlight for you at Buffalo?

There have been many great highlights at Buffalo, but I definitely enjoy my classmates and community at Buffalo the most. I really appreciate being able to collaborate with them, discuss treatments, and get their perspectives on different projects. It's a unique time in my life when I have access to 30 colleagues, all with interesting ideas and experiences. It's also been great to have a close-knit group of friends to hang out with outside of school. Even with the pandemic, we have frequent zoom happy hours and play games together online!

7. How do you feel your experience at Buffalo differs from other conservation programs?

I think one difference would be that, at Buffalo, you complete at least one full treatment in each of the specialties before you declare a specialty at the beginning of the second year. During your first year, everyone is assigned at least one work of art on paper, one painting, and one object. It was really valuable to get experience in each of the specialties to understand the differences and similarities going through all the treatment steps. Treating the artifacts while simultaneously taking courses in imaging, science, objects, painting, and paper helped me make connections across disciplines. We would learn the chemistry behind certain topics like organic resins one morning and then the following afternoon we would gain practical knowledge about the application of such materials and visually identify examples in specialty classes. This not only helped reinforce what I had learned in other classes but also really helped me put interdisciplinary skills into practice.

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

I think everyone has a different story of how they discovered conservation and what path they took to get into graduate school, so what worked for me might not work for others. However one of the best pieces of advice I was given was to make sure you feel ready for graduate school before you apply. I have friends that wish they had explored all of the specialties before they applied or had stuck to just one specialty. I also think it's important to get a lot of different experiences in conservation before applying. While treatment can be important, I think there are many other ways to obtain valuable skills, from understanding preventative conservation to volunteering for outreach in different communities.

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

I applied to graduate school twice and the first year I received an interview but didn't get accepted. The second year I got into Buffalo. I really could not speak to what might have been the strongest component of my application. I had a lot of different experiences and conservation treatment from working at a private practice. My experience there gave me a lot of confidence in my hands-on treatment skills. I also tried to have an interesting art portfolio with a range of media and materials present from different printmaking techniques to painting to a wooden box with dovetail joints.

10. Is there anything you wish you had done before starting your studies to better prepare for graduate school at Buffalo?

If anything, I wish I had refreshed my chemistry knowledge. Buffalo has a rigorous science curriculum with courses and labs taken each semester. We get hands-on experience using different scientific instruments and data analysis. My last chemistry course had been several years prior to being accepted to graduate school and it definitely would have been beneficial to get some review.

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

I think the biggest requirement I would change is getting rid of the GRE. The test is so expensive and a lot of pre-program positions are volunteer-based, so it's really hard to make a living wage, get conservation experience and prepare for graduate school at the same time. I think more flexibility in the course requirements would also be great, like studio art and art history. While the programs do look at your application as a whole, such as life experiences, I also think other work should be taken into greater account. Years working at a frame shop would be amazing hand-skills even if it didn't count towards conservation hours specifically. While I know programs have slowly been in the process of changing such requirements to be more flexible, I do think the pandemic has helped instigate a greater need for change to allow the conservation field to be more inclusive.

We (and so many of your colleagues) are in complete agreement on that. Thank you so much, Abby, for your time and generous answers that share with all of us your experiences before and at Buffalo!

Readers, stay tuned for our next interview in April and 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

Abby Schleicher is currently a second-year graduate fellow in art conservation at SUNY Buffalo State, Garman Art Conservation Department specializing in art on paper. Before graduate school, Abby worked as a sculpture technician at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and as a pre-program conservation technician at Heugh-Edmondson Conservation Services, LLC in Kansas City, Missouri. While she is interested in all things paper she is currently interested in modern and contemporary works of art on paper with applied media, watercolors, and pastels.