



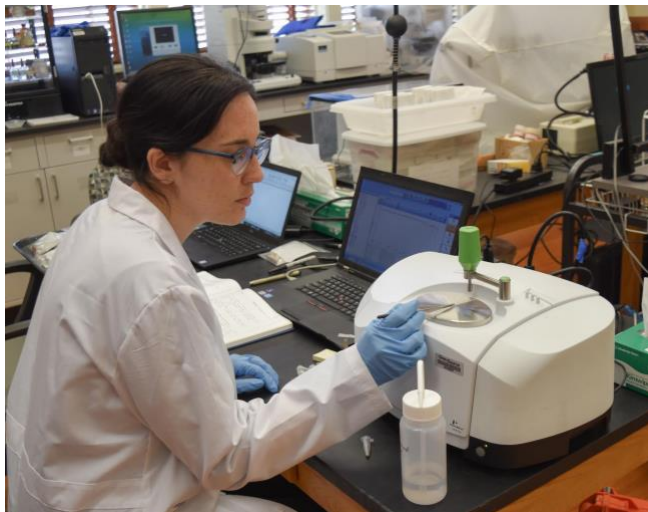
Emerging  
Conservation  
Professionals  
Network

# Get to know the ECPN Graduate Liaisons

## Spotlight on UCLA/Getty

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 **Lauren Conway**, current MA student and UCLA/Getty Liaison, and **Elizabeth Salmon**, current PhD candidate and ECPN co-Liaison to the LA Region, who have both graciously answered questions about their graduate studies, pre-program experiences, and career goals.



(Left) Elizabeth Salmon tests a protocol to detect oily residue using FTIR as part of her pre-program research at the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT). Photo by Marissa Bartz.

(Right) Lauren Conway consolidating flaking paint on a Yoruba stool from the Fowler Museum during her first year in the UCLA/Getty Conservation Program. Photo by Elizabeth Salmon

**The UCLA/Getty Interdepartmental Program (IDP) in the Conservation of Archaeological and Ethnographic Materials**, is a three year degree program jointly sponsored by the Getty Conservation Institute and the University of California, Los Angeles. Graduate students earn an M.A. in Conservation, usually specializing in composite objects, largely from archaeological contexts or made by indigenous communities. UCLA recently began and admitted the first candidates to a PhD program in the Conservation of Material Culture (CMC). The UCLA/Getty program website [\[https://conservation.ucla.edu\]](https://conservation.ucla.edu) has a wealth of information regarding their programs, entry requirements, and information about current students. If you have additional questions and don't want to cold email a program administrator, please reach out to Lauren at [ucla.getty.ecpn.liaison@gmail.com](mailto:ucla.getty.ecpn.liaison@gmail.com).

Scroll through below for personal insight, tips and tricks, and valuable information about these impressive emerging conservators, their graduate studies, and chosen specialty!

## Outreach Officers' Burning Questions:

### 1. How do you feel your experience at UCLA differs from other conservation programs? What does UCLA do differently from other programs in conservation?

*Lauren Conway:* One basic difference between UCLA and the other programs is the class schedule. UCLA is on the quarter system rather than semesters, which means classes are condensed into 10 weeks as opposed to the typical 15. Things move at a very fast pace and you have to be careful not to fall behind. The abbreviated timeframe also makes it more difficult to complete treatments for classes, so time management is essential in this regard.

UCLA is the only program in North America which includes working with Indigenous communities in its curriculum. In an upcoming class this winter, we will be working with a tribal community in Southern California to conserve basketry from their museum collection. Community collaboration is important and increasingly prioritized by conservators, and I'm glad that my program is providing me the opportunity to learn from community members.

*Elizabeth Salmon:* UCLA always stood out to me as the program that puts a primary focus on community and cultural context, rather than the treatment of individual objects. There's no doubt that all of the conservation programs equip students with a strong practical skill set, but each has their own specialty. The faculty's dedication to working with communities and within different social guidelines to ethically conserve cultural heritage goes back to the start of the program and that's what made the UCLA program so attractive to me. My background is in Anthropology and I was really passionate about the community-oriented conservation work that I was involved in during my pre-program internships. For those reasons, I knew that UCLA was the right fit for me from the time I began considering a career in conservation.

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

*Lauren:* The UCLA/Getty program is very collaborative, so you'll meet and work with people from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines. Many of our courses are cross-listed with other departments, so we often take classes with students in archaeology, materials science, art history, and information studies. I've really enjoyed working with students from other disciplines because we get to learn about each other's approaches and perspectives. Conservators never work alone, especially those who work at museums and archaeological sites, so I'm glad I have the opportunity to improve my communication skills during graduate school.

### 3. What resources were most helpful to you while preparing for graduate school?

*Elizabeth:* While preparing for graduate school, I tuned in for several free webinars offered through [FAIC's Connecting to Collections Care](#) series. I also found webinars offered through regional historical societies, like the [Wisconsin Historical Society](#), which right now has a lot of great resources posted on the website in celebration of National Native American Heritage Month. I could often listen to webinars on headphones while I was working in the lab or doing some tedious work with my hands. I could usually find a few online lectures to attend each month, but there are so many more available now that many of us are working from home! I recommend checking out the monthly webinar series that the UCLA/Getty program is hosting this year; you can find more information on the [UCLA/Getty Conservation Program Facebook page](#). There are also so many different organizations which host presentations relevant to conservation; not just AIC, but local historical societies, museums, research organizations, etc. hosting virtual events that are interesting and informative. Online lectures are a great way to find out what's going on in the field and think about research you could pursue in the future.

#### **4. What resources do you consistently reach for during graduate courses/when approaching treatments?**

*Elizabeth:* I often refer to the book, *Material Characterization Tests for Objects of Art and Archaeology* by Nancy Odegaard et al, which summarizes many of the chemical spot tests used to positively identify materials with step-by-step instructions on how to carry them out. When it comes to working with objects, there are always questions about what materials were used to make, assemble, or repair the object that can provide a lot of information about its history. There are certainly other great resources out there about materials characterization; the most important thing is to be aware of what kinds of spot tests are available that can help to identify materials.

#### **5. What has been your favorite treatment/project you have completed at UCLA (or pre-program)? Why?**

*Lauren:* My classmates and I were able to work on material from the Wellcome Collection at the Fowler Museum as part of our organics lab. I was fortunate enough to work on an amazing polychrome wood stool made by a member of the Yoruba, located in present-day Nigeria and Benin. This was the most involved treatment I've ever done and I was able to use several analytical techniques to examine the stool before beginning treatment. With the help of Jeff Maish, a conservator at the Getty Villa, I was able to x-ray the stool and see how iron nails were used to attach some of the outer elements. This was particularly interesting because it confirmed our belief that most of the stool was carved from a single piece of wood, and only a few pieces were attached using nails. This was also an interesting treatment because I had to do a lot of problem-solving to find the right material for consolidating flaking paint on the stool. The different paint colors had different solubilities, so I had to do extensive testing beforehand to ensure I selected a consolidant and solvent that would not interfere. Unfortunately, I was not able to complete my treatment before the lab shut down due to COVID-19, but I am hopeful I'll be able to finish it once the lab re-opens!

#### **6. What has been the biggest challenge for you at UCLA?**

*Lauren:* I'd say my biggest challenge is time management. Grad school is basically a full-time job, but on top of that I often feel compelled to sign up for as many projects and additional courses as possible or risk missing out on an amazing opportunity. Add in time for sleep, self-care, and sitting in traffic (when classes are in person) and there don't seem to be enough hours in the day! It's very difficult not to spread myself too thin and feel overwhelmed, especially since the pandemic began. I'm trying to get better about prioritizing what I want to be involved in and taking care of my mental health.

*Elizabeth:* The COVID-19 pandemic has definitely been the biggest challenge for our cohort. Since UCLA is located in such a populous city, we still haven't gotten a chance to get back to our labs at all. Despite this, the faculty and staff at the UCLA program managed to put together really comprehensive "lab kits" to make sure we can continue coursework at home and still get valuable hands-on experience. It's really been a testament to the versatility and resilience of this program and has equipped us all to be resourceful in our conservation practice. I'm sure the majority of us will take on some fieldwork or other on-site work at some point in our future careers and rising to this challenge has really helped us prepare for that.

#### **7. What has been the biggest highlight for you at UCLA?**

*Elizabeth:* It's so hard to name just one! The resources and facilities that the program has access to are obviously top notch, but I have to say that the highlight of UCLA has been the people. My fellow students in both the PhD and MA cohorts are really dedicated, passionate people with so many diverse interests and skill sets. We are always encouraging each other and bouncing ideas off of one another. The faculty and staff at the program also go above and beyond to help facilitate our coursework and research. All this has just been amplified since we've started at-home learning. Despite the challenges related to the pandemic, we're all still in really close communication and encouraging one another to perform at a high level.

**8. Has UCLA arranged networking for future job/internship opportunities? Are alumni involved with hiring/networking?**

*Elizabeth:* Yes, we have a faculty member who is designated as the “internship coordinator.” They have been so dedicated to helping us identify internship opportunities that align closely with our interests and helping us make the right introductions. As for the alumni, we (the students) are working on launching a mentorship program that allows current students to seek out alumni mentors. Some of my fellow students also put together a great alumni lecture series this past summer when alumni of the program were invited to present their work virtually and that was a great opportunity to connect with alumni and gauge shared interests while also hear about what projects are ongoing at their respective workplaces.

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

*Lauren:* Even if you know you want to focus on archaeological and indigenous materials, there is still much that can be learned from other specializations. Some applicants worry about having the right experience for the UCLA/Getty program since it’s more specialized than the others, but students in the program come from a wide range of backgrounds. Of course, it’s helpful to have experience with archaeological and indigenous materials, but don’t feel like you need to focus on these exclusively during your pre-program internships. Objects conservators encounter a wide variety of materials, so it can come in handy to know about a technique or material used in another specialty. My pre-program experience included work with paper, paintings, and library materials, and I have seen overlap with all of these specialties during my classes.

*Elizabeth:* I highly recommend pursuing a range of pre-program experiences that inspire you, even if the connection to your graduate application or conservation portfolio isn’t immediately clear. I knew that I wanted to do conservation since my junior year of college, though my experiences in the five years between graduating from college and starting graduate school didn’t always have a direct connection to conservation. As I look back, it’s clear that each of my pre-program experiences have informed the work that I am doing now. For example, I pursued a language fellowship in India that allowed me to speak to museum staff, artists, and members of the community outside the conservation department, which helped me better understand the benefits and challenges of community-oriented conservation projects. I also took on a conservation research job that didn’t allow me any treatment or museum experience but ended up being an extremely valuable introduction to experimental design and various analytical tools. Having to limit my search to paid opportunities was a constraint that actually made me consider a broader range of pre-program experiences, which is something that has only benefited me as a graduate student.

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

*Lauren:* I applied to the four American programs once and was accepted to UCLA. I know it can be daunting for people the first time they apply to the programs, but don’t stress if you don’t have thousands of hours of experience. UCLA accepts people from a variety of different backgrounds, and everyone brings a different perspective to the program. Treatment experience is not the only component of the application, and there are lots of other opportunities to showcase what makes you unique. I think it’s also important for an applicant to show how passionate they are about conservation and demonstrate a willingness to learn new material. If I had to guess what the strongest part of my application was, I would say I had a good mix of working with archaeological and indigenous materials, as well as exposure to other specializations. I also worked with community members from Picuris Pueblo to help reopen their tribal museum for my undergraduate thesis, which I think was a unique experience that helped me stand out. UCLA was definitely my top choice because the program’s focus aligns very closely with my interests.

*Elizabeth:* I was accepted the first time I applied to graduate school (I had been doing conservation or conservation research for about 4 years when I applied). Since I applied to the PhD program, I think that the fact that I had research experience and also a clear idea of what I wanted to study really strengthened my application. In my application, I

proposed to study traditional pest management methods with potential to be incorporated into preventive conservation more widely and that's the project that I am pursuing for my dissertation. I had some exposure to traditional pest management methods during my pre-program work in India and there were questions that always stuck with me, though I never got a chance to look closely and explore the topic. Although I considered other research projects, it ended up being a topic that had been in the back of my mind for a few years that had the most potential, even though it was just based off of an observation I had as an intern. I think that having a personal connection to what you aim to research (either through your personal background, previous studies, or conservation experience) and being able to express why it's important to you and to the field is what makes a strong application.

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

*Elizabeth:* The most important part of the application process should be to select a group of students with different experiences, skills, and ways of thinking who can help one another learn and also make the field more dynamic and resourceful. That said, I think that the fewer admission requirements there are, the better. While there are certain prerequisite courses that are essential background to studies in conservation, like organic chemistry classes, other requirements, like the GRE, specific language courses, or taking on the high cost of traveling to graduate program interviews, can act as unnecessary hurdles that keep otherwise strong applicants from applying. Fortunately, the programs seem to be considering these factors and moving in this direction. I was really pleased to learn that UCLA holds its PhD interviews virtually, for example. It is in the best interests of the programs and the field that a high number of students are able to apply so that the applicants with most potential can be selected and trained as conservators.

**Thank you both so much for taking the time to answer our questions. We wish you all the best in the rest of your time at UCLA/Getty and look forward to reading the results of your research topics!**

**To our audience, stay tuned, as these UCLA/Getty grads continue to make important contributions to the field. Again, please reach out to Lauren with questions about the program and to either Lauren or Elizabeth about their paths, insights, or anything else you can think of. As homework, peruse the UCLA/Getty program website, sign up for a lecture in the Distinguished Speaker Series, and let us know what you think of this Graduate Liaison Highlight series!**

#### **Bios:**

**Lauren Conway:** Lauren Conway is a second year M.A. student in the UCLA/Getty Conservation Program. She received her BA in Anthropology on the archaeology track from Barnard College of Columbia University in 2018. As a pre-programmer, she worked on archaeological sites in Italy, Bulgaria, and Macedonia, and interned in the Columbia University Libraries Conservation Laboratory, the paintings laboratory at the New-York Historical Society, the anthropology conservation laboratory of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), and with a paper conservator in a private practice. Lauren is currently researching the use of 3D modeling as a tool for conservation documentation for her master's thesis.

**Elizabeth Salmon:** Elizabeth Salmon is a second-year PhD student in Conservation of Material Culture at UCLA. She earned her BA in Anthropology and Asian Studies from Vassar College in 2014. Her current research aims to source culturally relevant and locally available preventive care methods by looking to the traditional ecological knowledge of communities. She is a ECPN Regional Liaison for Southern California and a Project Assistant for Untold Stories, a program that aims to ensure a conservation profession that represents and preserves a fuller spectrum of human cultural heritage. Previously, she was a Research Associate at the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, where she studied the effects of oil spills on cultural sites and worked to develop spill response treatments for cultural materials. She is committed to work that promotes collaboration, accessibility, and cultural awareness in the greater field conservation