

WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

# MUSEUM STUDIES

NEWSLETTER

2023-2024



**Western Illinois  
University**

**MUSEUM STUDIES**

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*Alums Kelly Lao, Clair Tobin, and Brian Allen at the IMA Conference on the WIU-QC campus.*

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# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

DR. HEIDI LUNG



Hello and greetings from the WIU-QC Museum Studies Graduate Program,

This marks our first edition of a departmental newsletter, and as you will read, it has been an exciting and busy academic year. From hosting the Iowa Museum Association Annual Conference Power of Place in the fall to sponsoring the Career Conversations online program this spring, WIU Museum Studies has accomplished much during the 2023-2024 academic year.

As you read about the exciting events and happenings, you will see how our program integrates relevant coursework, professional development, and experiential learning opportunities to give students real-world experience. Students in the program make the most of these opportunities and have not faltered in achieving their goals. In 2023- 2024, nine students met the graduation requirements. Several have already started new and exciting positions in the field. We wish all our recent graduates the best of luck as they move forward in their careers.

As you peruse this newsletter, you'll discover that the WIU Museum Studies Graduate program is more than just a department on the WIU-Quad City Campus. It's a vibrant community comprising faculty, students, staff, alumni, and numerous collaborating partners from the industry and the Quad City community. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all for being part of this year's success and eagerly anticipate the exciting opportunities that lie ahead.

Enjoy summer and Museum On!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Heidi K. Lung".

Dr. Heidi Lung, Director  
WIU Museum Studies Graduate Program



## FACULTY MESSAGE

Dr. Angela McClanahan-Simmons

Over the last academic year, I've learned a great deal through both designing and teaching a new course called 'Museum Origins,' which is devoted entirely to the history of Museums, as well as revising my Material Cultures course. Because my academic and museum career has been located primarily in the UK, I didn't know as much about the history of American Museums as I'd have liked. Museum Origins allowed me to explore material I hadn't previously been very familiar with, including the development of natural history museums and how this shaped scientific inquiry in the US, as well as looking more closely at the history of World's Fairs, particularly in Chicago and St. Louis, and how these directly shaped modes of display, how they drew on 'Otherness' in framing cultures, and the direct legacy these events had on the landscapes of both cities.

In my Material Cultures course, I developed a session I'd taught for years on death practices into a new project that recently won University Research Council funding. The project examines the significance of 20th-century funerary images from Appalachia and their exchange with family and communities who migrated to the industrial Midwest.

Teaching the course Museum Exhibition was also a new endeavor. This year, the course focused on creating a Virtual Sensorium with students, an initiative in conjunction with the Justice, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity Office at WIU.

In all, it was a productive year of learning and teaching!

Dr. Angela McClanahan-Simmons

# YEAR IN REVIEW

## 2023-24 NUMBERS

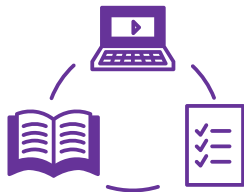


**20 Students in the Program**  
**9 Graduated in with MA Degrees**



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### 10 Departmental Courses Offered



Museum Origins  
Museum Administration  
Collections Management  
Exhibition Planning  
Museum Education  
Independent Study  
Material Culture  
Repatriation: Histories, Policies and Practices  
Historic House Museums  
Museum Careers  
Practicum, Internship, Workshops

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### 2 Museum Studies Faculty

Dr. Heidi Lung  
Dr. Angela McClanahan-Simmons



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### 4 Institutional Industry Memberships

Iowa Museum Association  
Illinois Association of Museums  
Association of Mid-West Museums  
Alliance of American Museums



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### Over 10,000 Student Hours

Students working in Quad City community museums and cultural institutions through Graduate Assistantships, Internships, Practicums, and Projects



# YEAR IN REVIEW

## 2023 IMA CONFERENCE

### POWER OF PLACE



In October, the Iowa Museum Association held its 2023 annual conference, *Power of Place*, on both the Illinois and Iowa sides of the Quad Cities.

During the first full day of the conference, professionals from across the region participants visited the Figge Art Museum and the Putnam Museum in Davenport, Iowa. The second full day was held on the WIU-Quad Cities Campus across the river in Moline, Illinois.

WIU Museum Studies was thrilled to welcome museum professionals from all over the Midwest. Students, faculty, over 20 program alumni, and 100 other attendees engaged in sessions discussing all aspects of museum work. Students especially enjoyed connecting with the museum world in a professional capacity.

*"We received great feedback from conferencegoers who attended our session"*

Sessions went all day, and students were encouraged to attend all the sessions they could at no cost. Faculty, alumni, and current students presented their research in breakout sessions.



*Current students, faculty, and alumni attending the IMA 2023 conference in WIU's Riverfront Hall.*

Several students presented their work reflecting on the multimedia 2023 spring installation of artist Miriam Alarcón Avila's multimedia exhibit, "Luchadores Immigrants," on the WIU-QC campus.

Anna Thomas, a student involved in the project, stated, "As an emerging professional, it was an amazing experience to discuss the installation at the IMA conference. What made this presentation unique was working alongside the artist during the installation process. We received great feedback from conference goers who attended our session, and a popular message shared with us was how lucky we were to get experience by working with an artist during an installation while in grad school."



**Clare Tobin, WIU Museum Studies Alumna Wins IMA's 2023 Shinning Star Award**

As with any IMA conference, participants took tours of museum collections, including those at the Figge Art Museum, Putnam Museum, and the German American Heritage Museum. Industry partners engaged participants in a resource fair. Thank you to the IMA Executive Director Cynthia Sweet, the IMA conference planning committee, and all who organized and attended the successful event.





# 2023-2024 GRADUATES



## ZACKARY BARAGLIA

**BACKGROUND:** Museum Studies

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Historic houses

**UPDATE:** Zackary began working overseeing special events for the Ellwood House Museum in DeKalb, IL



## GRACE COFFMAN

**BACKGROUND:** History and Public Relations

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Education and Exhibition Design

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Exhibitions Designer or Museum Educator



## CHARLOTTE DRENEN

**BACKGROUND:** History and Art History

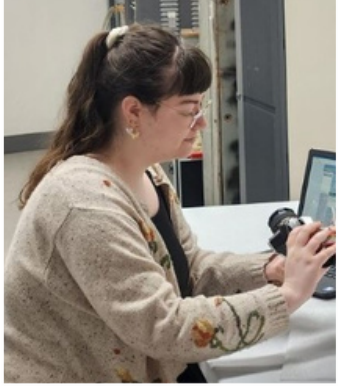
**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Research, exhibition design/construction/set up & tear down, and collections

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Research in the archives





# 2023-2024 GRADUATES



## JULIA GABBARD

**BACKGROUND:** History and Art History

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Collections and accessibility

**UPDATE:** Julia shifted to a career in K-12 education and earned the “Substitute of the Year” award from her district in Dalton, GA.



## SADIE HYNICK

**BACKGROUND:** History and Art History

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Collections

**UPDATE:** Sadie is currently working as a Museum Collection Associate for Paisley Park in Minneapolis, MN



## ALEX NASHARR

**BACKGROUND:** Fine Arts

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Art history, exhibit design, programming, and education

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Curator at Art Museum



# 2023-2024 GRADUATES



## ELI SADLER

**BACKGROUND:** Ancient History and Archaeology

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Collections and Exhibits

**UPDATE:** Eli recently began working in the Registrar Department for the Philadelphia Museum of Art



## ANNA THOMAS

**BACKGROUND:** History and Art History

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Collections, Education, and Material Culture

**UPDATE:** Anna is working as an independent exhibit and program consultant for Riverdale, Iowa's 75th Anniversary Celebration project.



## LINDSEY VANDIEREN

**BACKGROUND:** History

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Exhibition design and collections

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Working for a history organization.

# Congratulations Graduates!



Sadie

Julia

Lindsey

Alex

Charlotte

Grace

Anna

Eli

Zack





## JO BURKE

**BACKGROUND:** Fine Art

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Collections and Archives

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Registrar



## SAMANTHA COOLING

**BACKGROUND:** Anthropology and Asian Studies

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Collections

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Collections care



## ALEXA FULGENCIO

**BACKGROUND:** Anthropology

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Collections and Education

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Collections Manager



## ALYSSA GRADY

**BACKGROUND:** History, ancient civilizations, and art history

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Collections Manager

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Exhibit Designer



## CLAUDIA HARLEY

**BACKGROUND:** Art History

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Museum Studies

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Taking museums from 19th to 21st century



## TAYLOR KILGUS

**BACKGROUND:** History, Art History, Diversity, Justice, and Gender Studies

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Administration

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Museum director at a Smithsonian or to work in National Archives



## HENRY MUHLENA

**BACKGROUND:** History

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Museum Collections



## SAVANNAH SMITH

**BACKGROUND:** Art History, Education, and Museum Studies

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Education, Programming, and Archives

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Archivist



## JAMES SOTO

**BACKGROUND:** Communication, History, Anthropology, and Art

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Administration

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Museum Administrator



## SARAH TAPPER

**BACKGROUND:** Art Therapy and Art History

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Collections management and the protection of cultural heritage

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Curator, collections specialist



## DR. LASHANTA WILLIAMS

**BACKGROUND:** Education

**AREAS OF INTEREST:** Education, programming, collections

**MUSEUM DREAM JOB:** Museum Director, Director of Programming & Education, curator

# THANK YOU!

## COMMUNITY MUSEUM PARTNERS

The WIU Museum Studies Graduate Program has a special relationship with all the museums in the Quad City region.

Students serve as Graduate Assistants and complete internships, allowing them to earn degrees while gaining real-world museum experience.

Quad City museums and organizations also serve as laboratories for learning. During the 2023-2024 academic year, students worked over 10,000 hours through these high-impact learning experiences.

**THANK YOU** to all our community museum partners who supported WIU Museum Studies students over the 2023-2024 academic year.

An extra **BIG** thank you to the museums whose logos appear to the right for funding students through Graduate Assistantships.



# GRADUATE EXPERIENCE IN MUSEUM STUDIES ST. LOUIS TRIP

The museum studies student organization, Graduate Experience in Museum Studies, or GEMS, had a 'comeback year.' Since COVID, getting together just hasn't been the same, so this year, officers wanted to add to the program by creating a fun community for our students. So, in 2023-24, GEMS hosted a movie night, a graduation celebration, and, most notably, a successful weekend trip to St. Louis!

The fast-paced weekend trip to St. Louis included visits to the St. Louis Science Center, Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri Historical Society and Museum, the St. Louis Zoo, and the St. Louis Arch. At the St. Louis Science Center, students got a behind-the-scenes tour from two WIU Museum Studies Program alums: Neville Crenshaw, Associate Director of Strategic Planning and Special Projects, and Kaylia Eskew, Manager of Special Exhibitions and Experiences. Students took a professionally orientated tour of the facility, including a look at how exhibits and programs are developed. Students even took a ride in the space flight simulators!



*Students with program alums, Neville Crenshaw  
Associate Director of Strategic Planning at the St. Louis Science Center*



Students visited the Saint Louis Art Museum during their Friday night event, which features art and live music that can be heard throughout the galleries. Saturday included a tour of the Missouri History Museum with Dr. Victoria Eudy, Manager of Institutional Evaluation, and former WIU Museum Studies faculty. She guided students through the new 1904 World's Fair exhibit and discussed visitor evaluation. The afternoon included a visit to the St. Louis Zoo. Students ended the trip by visiting the St. Louis Gateway Arch National Park and rode the tram to the top before returning to the Quad Cities.

The trip included great museums, student bonding, and connecting with professionals and program alums. Jo Burke, a GEMS member who went on the trip, remembers it as "fun and educational." She explains, "It brought me closer to my classmates and inspired me by seeing practices in place that we talk about in class."



***Students with Dr. Victoria Eudy, former WIU faculty member, now Manager of Institutional Evaluation at the Missouri History Museum***



***Students on the flight simulator at the St. Louis Science Center***



***Students with alumni, Kaylia Eskew, Manager of Special Exhibitions at the St. Louis Science Center***



***GEMS at the top of the St. Louis Arch***

# IOWA MUSEUM ASSOCIATION CAREER CONVERSATIONS

SPONSORED BY WIU MUSEUM STUDIES

Hosted by the Iowa Museum Association and sponsored by the WIU Museum Studies Program, this virtual ZOOM event was for emerging professionals, professionals in career transition, and individuals interested in connecting with these museum professionals.

During the event, five panelists shared their educational and career paths, talked about how they got their current positions, explored the highs and lows of working in cultural institutions, and answered questions from the audience.

Two professionals presenting on the panel are WIU Museum Studies Program alumni. Kelly Lao, Co-Interim CEO and Vice President of Museum Experiences at the Putman Museum in Davenport, Iowa, and Hope Stropes, Associate Curator of the Ella Sharp Museum in Jackson, Michigan, shared advice about entering and working in the museum field.

WIU Museum Studies hosted a live watch party on the WIU-QC campus. A great turnout of students and alumni spent the evening learning from museum professionals and eating pizza; door prizes and many sweet treats added to the fun learning atmosphere.



# HOW'D YOU GET THAT KICK ASS MUSEUM JOB?

WITH WIU MUSEUM STUDIES ALUMNI

BY GRACE COFFMAN, MUSEUM STUDIES DEPARTMENT GA 2023-24

**Hope Stropes** is the Associate Curator at the Ella Sharp Museum in Jackson, Michigan. Her job is split into two parts: collections and exhibits. "On the collections side, I care for and manage the collection, including monitoring the climate of our collection's spaces, and the intake of new object donations. On the exhibits side, assist with the installation and deinstallation of our exhibits," says Hope. She is also currently co-curating a new local history exhibit.

Museum jobs are competitive and Hope experienced the process of finding one first hand. "I applied for jobs for almost six months before I got an offer. I went through dozens of interviews and second



interviews just to get that dreaded rejection email. This is a competitive field, and sometimes it takes time to find the right fit. Just be patient."

Hope credits her experience at WIU for helping her get to where she is today. "One of my favorite aspects of WIU's program is the variety of classes. Even though my goal was to work in collections and exhibits, learning about visitor studies, education, and museum administration was essential to being well-rounded in the field," she says. "Additionally, the program offers several graduate assistantship positions. I worked as the GA for the Putnam Museum and Science Center for one year, and the hands-on experience I gained from that experience was essential to my future career." Hope's advice for current museum studies students is to get hands-on experience and way you can."

**“ get hands-on experience any way you can.”**

"Whether that be through an internship, a graduate assistantship, or through volunteering," she says. "Combining classroom education and hands-on experience is the best way to prepare you for your future career."



**Addison Marsengill at work.**  
**Photo credit: A. Marsengill**

**Addison Marsengill** is currently an Archival Intern at the Museum of Danish America in Elk Horn, Iowa. In this role, he spearheads the digitization efforts of the Danish Sisterhood of America's books and organizational ledgers, which involve ensuring the accessibility of historical records and the preservation of artifacts. Additionally, Addison contributes to various aspects of the collections team, provides support for exhibitions, engages in outreach activities, and offers expertise to organizational committees on matters such as accession, deaccession, and exhibition development.

"Our overarching goal is to safeguard historical documents by converting them into digital formats, enhancing accessibility, searchability, and sharing capabilities. This approach not only facilitates preservation planning but also amplifies engagement and promotes cultural heritage, all while offering cost efficiencies. Through digitization, organizations can effectively preserve cultural treasures, promote understanding, and cultivate a deeper connection with heritage."

"Job searching for a position in the museum world is both demanding and rewarding," says Addison. He also discusses a particularly intriguing and unexpected turn of events that led to the internship he currently holds. "Initially, my job search included applications for positions that closely matched my skill set and interests but despite my best efforts, one notable experience stood out amidst the multitude of applications—a failed attempt at securing a position that fell beyond the boundaries of my usual experience range. This setback, although disheartening at the time, ultimately led me down an unforeseen path," he says. "The internship I eventually obtained," Addison relates, "emerged as a silver lining amidst the initial disappointment. It was a testament to the unpredictable nature of the job market and the importance of remaining open to unforeseen opportunities."

**“Securing a museum job proved to be a demanding yet fulfilling journey.”**

Addison goes on to explain, "It has required dedication and resilience. It required thorough research to find suitable opportunities, careful customization of applications to distinguish myself in a highly competitive market, and persistent networking to forge connections within the museum community. Last year's search for a job was characterized by moments of uncertainty and setbacks, requiring resilience, persistence, and luck."

Addison gives the following advice for emerging museum professionals:

Embrace hands-on, experiential learning: Use opportunities such as internships, volunteering, and projects to immerse yourself in the museum field. These experiences, along with your connections, weigh heavily in applications—often more so than any grades or coursework. Not only will they sharpen your skills, but they will also offer invaluable insights into the daily workings of museums.



*The photo above is an inside look at the Museum of Danish America's collection storage area.  
Photo credit: Addison Marsengill*

Follow your passions: Discover motifs of the museum field that motivate you, then pursue opportunities that resonate with those interests. Your enthusiasm and commitment to your trade will distinguish you as a professional. Don't be afraid to venture beyond the prescribed curriculum of your program.

While studying for my master's in Museum Studies at WIU, the coursework primarily centered on art history, theory, and development. Despite my background in Archaeology and a strong affinity for natural history, I worked closely with Dr. Lung to search for supplementary classes that matched my passions while meeting graduation criteria.

Be adaptable: The museum field is dynamic and constantly evolving, so be open to new ideas, technologies, and approaches. Flexibility and adaptability are key qualities that will serve you well as you navigate your education and career.

Stay persistent: The museum field is competitive, so don't be discouraged by setbacks, rejections, or even ghosting. Stay focused on your goals, continue honing your skills, and apply to opportunities that align with your interests and aspirations.

Lastly, keep learning and growing: Even after securing a job, invest in your professional development and yourself by seeking more opportunities for learning, skill-building, and career advancement.

**Jordan Miller** currently works at the United States Navy Seabee Museum, which is one of the ten museums that are run by the US Navy by way of the Naval History and Heritage Command. The institution is dedicated to preserving the history of the Seabees and members of the Civil Engineering Corps. Jordan's official job title is Curator, although it is more closely aligned with the duties of a collections manager. "My main job is to take care of the collection, perform inventories, and catalog the collection on a regular schedule, performing minor maintenance on artifacts to ensure their longevity." As museum professionals, we know that we have to wear many hats, so Jordan is also in charge of periodic blog posts on the museum's Facebook page about objects in the collection.

Jordan talks about how he got his museum job. "It was about as complicated as it could be," he says. He found this opening on USAJobs by chance when looking through museum jobs and applied. "I just supplied a resume, cover letter, and my official WIU transcripts. Now this was the easiest part, everything past here starts to get more complicated." He submitted all these things back in early August, got a phone interview a week or so later, and finally received an email from HR letting him know he'd been selected about three weeks after the phone interview. Jordan had to then go through the process of security background checks, fingerprinting, and government onboarding tasks and paperwork. The whole process took about five months, from application to onboarding. "Needless to say, it took way longer than I thought it would."

Jordan touches on his experience at WIU by talking about his internship. "I'd say Western prepared me for my current role by having such a robust internship and grad assistant program. Having that experience from other institutions and being able to apply the stuff we learned in the classroom in a practical setting helps immensely."

Jordan advises current students to "start gaining experience at any opportunity. Having the degree is nice and all, but it's the job experience that seals the deal." He also suggests making connections with museum professionals.

Jordan's final advice includes not giving up. "This field moves incredibly slow during job hunting, and it'll feel like you send in applications, and they just disappear into the void. Then you won't hear back from someplace for like a month at least, if even at all," he says.



Photo credit: Jordan Miller

“**The museum world is very connected, someone always knows someone else. The larger your net, the easier it'll be for you to get your foot in the door.**”

“Job hunting is a humbling experience, you'll feel worthless, beat down, like no one wants to give you a chance. But keep working at it and apply for every opening you can, because positions don't stay open for long.” He makes a point to mention professional networks. “Keep in touch with them, you never know who might open that door for you.”



**Jordan Miller works in the collections department at the United States Navy Seabee Museum.**

**Photo Credits: Jordan Miller**



***Alums interviews were facilitated by Grace Coffman. The WIU Museum Studies Department thanks Hope, Addison, and Jordan for sharing their time and experience with us!***

***Are you a WIU Museum Studies Alumni with a story you want to share? We want to hear from you, contact Heidi Lung at [hk-lung.wiu.edu](mailto:hk-lung.wiu.edu)***

# GRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE

March 29, 2024  
Macomb, IL

WIU Museum Studies students Charlotte Tapper and Sarah Tapper represented the department at the 2024 WIU Graduate Research Conference, which was hosted by the WIU School of Graduate Studies in Macomb, Illinois.

Tapper and Drennen collaboratively presented their research, *Etruscans in Museums: Ethics, Looting, and The Protection of Cultural Heritage*, to an engaged group of graduate students and faculty during the event. Their research focused on the significance of the Etruscan culture and how “their fate as a “lost civilization” has brought their objects to the center of many controversies” within the museum field.

During the presentation, they described “the criminal acts that the Etruscans are often victims of, including looting of tombs and grave sites.” Objects are looted and often find their way into museum collections. The presentation included a section on what federal and cultural organizations are doing to protect sites like these. After the presentation, they answered many questions from an engaged audience.

Tapper and Drennen said they learned from the experience and from hearing from other graduate students. Drennen shared that the experience was “a chance to “dip their toes” into an academic conference.” Drennen graduated this spring, but Tapper, who is continuing in the fall, plans on presenting again next year. Thanks to both students for sharing this research with the WIU community!



**Charlotte Drennen and Sarah Tapper**  
**Photo Credit: Heidi Lung**





**Grace Coffman assisted with  
the design and content of  
this first edition of the WIU  
Museum Studies Newsletter.  
Thank you, Grace!**

***Grace Coffman, Museum Studies  
Department Graduate Assistant, 2023-24***

*Learn more about WIU Museum Studies at our website  
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***For questions about WIU Museum Studies, contact us by email at  
Dr. Heidi Lung, Director at [hk-lung@wiu.edu](mailto:hk-lung@wiu.edu)***



**Western Illinois  
University**

**MUSEUM STUDIES**

**Western Illinois University  
Museum Studies Program  
Moline, Illinois  
2023-2024**

