

# UD Art Conservation Liaison: Women's Leadership Initiative

## Status Report August 2024

In October 2023, Lauren Fair, Affiliated Associate Professor in Art Conservation, was hired on a limited contract as faculty liaison and content expert in conservation to assist with the department's partnership with the Women's Leadership Initiative (WLI) at the University of Delaware. The liaison encourages WUDPAC and PSP alumni to pursue leadership training offered by the WLI and connects with those taking the online certificate course. The contract covers the period of November 1, 2023–June 31, 2024, and is a pilot study to determine best strategies for leadership training for heritage conservation professionals, starting with our alumni and looking toward broader opportunities across the profession. (See **Appendix** for the full job description and aims of this position.) The following is a status report on this pilot study and provides recommendations for future steps.

### Background

In Spring 2023, the UD Art Conservation Department sponsored ten WUDPAC alumni as well as two faculty (who are also WUDPAC alumni) to complete the [Women's Leadership Online Certificate Course \(WLOC\)](#)<sup>1</sup> offered by the WLI. The ten alumni were part of a cohort that participated in the synchronous parts of the training together as one unit; while the two faculty/alumni were part of a separate cohort that included women in a variety of professions including banking, health and wellbeing, human resources, and student leadership development.

Following the WLOC program, the 12 alumni who took the course met to share takeaways and reflections. Themes and takeaways of this discussion (and others that have followed) include:

- There is great value in this course for the conservation professional, particularly for those at the **mid-career level**; sparks crucial conversations for our field and within our day-to-day work
- Also a desire for **management classes**, e.g., to understand the financial systems of the cultural heritage sector and the **monetary value** conservators bring to it
- Particularly helpful topics: **"both/and" thinking**, importance of **storytelling**, and improving **emotional intelligence** to maximize influence
- Value in learning the **language of the corporate world**
- **DEAI** should be everywhere, all the time, not isolated to a separate module at the end
- All-conservator cohorts fosters **camaraderie**, and diversity of cohorts fosters **cross-learning**
- Value to our professional organization, e.g., **AIC**, to provide **leadership training** to 1) support us in our roles within institutions and private businesses and 2) move the field forward
- Desire to **continue meeting** as a cohort! Desire for a mid-career professional network.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://lerner.udel.edu/centers/womens-leadership-initiative/wli-programs/womens-leadership-online/>

## Spring 2024 Cohort and Liaison Pilot Study

Given the success and potential demonstrated in the first round of sponsorships, in Spring 2024, the Art Conservation Department again sponsored alumni—this time 11 from both WUDPAC and PSP—to complete the WLOC. To enhance support, Lauren Fair was hired as faculty liaison as described above to work with both the WLI and this next cohort to enhance their experience. Specifically, Lauren executed the following:

1. Served as a resource and advocate for those interested in taking the WLOC
2. Worked with the WLI to establish the following structure for the spring WLOC:
  - Eleven conservation alumni split into diverse cohorts to maximize cross-learning
  - Liaison met with alumni group once after kickoff of the course and again at the end to build camaraderie and promote additional opportunities for self-reflection connected to the heritage conservation profession
3. Strategic planning for additional engagement with both the Spring 2023 and 2024 cohorts and potential future cohorts

Themes and takeaways from the discussions with the spring 2024 cohort include:

- Leadership training has value for **early-mid-career level through more senior level**
- Reasons **why participants sought this training** included feelings of burnout, imposter syndrome, and stuckness; hone advocacy skills to promote pay equity, boundary setting, and more assertive communication; build a business; reevaluate career path; prioritize work that aligns with personal values
- Particularly helpful topics: importance of **personality types** on communication, **emotional intelligence**, articulating your **origin story**
- Has provided a **new language and tools** to deal with stressors in the workplace
- Sense of community is strong—both across the program and among the conservation cohort that is meeting separately; there is a **“safe space” culture** that encourages vulnerability and sharing
- The pace of the course was too fast (sessions every week vs. every other week as in 2023)
- **DEAI** should be everywhere, all the time, not isolated to a separate module at the end
- Desire for **management training** that can cover additional topics, such as dealing with HR, conflict resolution, compensation philosophies and equitable negotiation, staff retention, managing data, dealing with pushback, etc.
- Desire to **continue meeting** as a cohort! This group wants to keep meeting in their small cohort.

## What Next?

The first two rounds of sponsoring WUDPAC and PSP alumni for WLOC training has been immensely successful. The role of the liaison has completed two essential goals: 1) established a network for the conservation alumni taking the course, and 2) maximized cross-learning with women in other professions. Conservation alumni participants report direct applicability of concepts learned to real life scenarios in their day-to-day work and career building. Many especially feel that the tools and terminology presented serve as a jumping off point to seek

additional trainings, particularly in the realm of management. All express gratitude for the sense of community and network created both with participants across the WLOC and the others in their conservation cohorts. There is a strong desire to continue fostering this sense of community, especially within the small established cohorts, and to have a safe space where the groups can continue to learn, share, and grow together.

Strategic planning meetings, including with Women's Leadership Initiative Director Lynn Evans, have raised promising pathways for additional alumni engagement facilitated by the department liaison. The department liaison can meet with the Spring 2023 and 2024 cohorts separately so as to foster the small trusted networks already established while serving as the go-between, cataloging common themes that arise in each group and providing the scheduling structure. Examples of small or larger group engagement that the liaison can facilitate include:

1. Organizing short sessions or trainings provided by the WLI<sup>2</sup> on key identified topics
2. Hold discussion meetings designed around a particular resource, e.g., webinar, article, podcast, etc.
3. Structure and launch a peer-to-peer mentorship program for all conservation alumni of the WLOC

If a third cohort of ten WUDPAC and PSP alumni are sponsored for the spring 2025 alumni, they can be added into the growing community.

## Advocacy Training at the Graduate Level

In addition to engagement with WUDPAC and PSP alumni who have taken the WLOC course, the department liaison has been drafting plans for a graduate-level seminar for third-year WUDPAC students aimed at preparing them for an intentional career path upon graduation. The planning team included WLI staff as well as alumna and Preservation Studies doctoral student Anisha Gupta and alumna and founder of the Living Histories Expansion Project Sarah Kleiner.

The first step was to poll recent graduates on the topics they saw as most important to include in such an advocacy training. These four questions were sent to the classes of 2021, 2022, and 2023:

1. Thinking back to your third year, what were the biggest questions/challenges that you faced as you thought about beginning your first post-grad position?
2. Do you see yourself as an emerging leader? In what way?
3. What resources could have better positioned and prepared you?
4. Any other topics related to leadership/advocacy that you feel are essential, or ideas you want us to consider?

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<sup>2</sup> Lynn Evans has vocalized her desire to support the Art Conservation Department in this initiative.

Of the 30 graduates polled, we received 13 thoughtful responses. Each offers deep insight into what our students feel is necessary as they step out into their professional lives. Key themes are listed below:

- Quality of life: where to live, getting a “good” job
- Money, financial training
- Boundaries and burnout
- Private work, billable hours, contracts
- Professional relationships within hierarchies
- Advocacy
- What success means to you, value alignment
- Questioning one’s own skills and abilities, imposter syndrome
- Job searching and the job interview process
- Grant writing
- Museum/library administration and management
- Creating trainings, developing curricula

Other important points raised include:

- What is the responsibility of graduate school to cover these topics?
- “Asking ECPs to become leaders” when this is not the “culture of conservation”
- Post-seminar survey likely needs to be done several years after the fact to bring meaningful responses

Based on the results of our survey, the planning team drafted several options for an online advocacy training to be held in two parts during the students’ third year of study. What is interesting to note is that many of the topics the students have identified as important needs for graduation align with what many of our alumni participants of the WLOC have also identified and articulated. This reinforces the value to prepare our students before graduation and underscores the field-wide nature of these needs.

To date, no third-year seminar has been implemented due to time constraints. However, resources have been identified.

## Appendix: Faculty Liaison WLI Job Description

The Department of Art Conservation is offering a limited contract for a faculty liaison and content expert in conservation to assist with our partnership with the UD Women's Leadership Initiative (WLI). This contract will likely require a total of five or six days during the period November 1, 2023 – June 31, 2024.

The finalist will work closely with the staff and faculty of the WLI as we support another cohort of ten WUDPAC and/or PSP alums to participate in the Spring online WLI training. They will provide additional facilitation during the spring 2024 programming designed to build and strengthen connections with our alum participants who will be divided in pairs across five groups and matched with women from other professions.

Specifically our faculty liaison will:

- Encourage our WUDPAC and PSP alums to apply to this opportunity.
- Build our conservation cohort and further promote opportunities for self-reflection connected to our profession. This faculty liaison will lead three additional sessions, prior to, during and following completion of the online course.
- Confer with the many alums and faculty who have participated in this training to identify ways to sustain these connections and to strengthen this training and these relationships.
- Consider, promote, and advance opportunities and implementation strategies for broader leadership training across the profession.

The finalist will report to the Department Chair who has overall responsibility for this initiative.

The Department of Art Conservation will pay up to six days @\$700/day.

Applicants should have participated in the UD Womens Leadership Initiative training and be committed to strengthening leadership skills across our alumni base and throughout the conservation profession. Please send a letter of interest to Susan Behrens by October 1, 2023.