

Pre-program intern advice from a former WACC intern and Program Graduate

(Hyperlinks checked 3/2025)

Undergraduate work: Each school has a different set of requirements for undergraduate coursework, but typically the schools require classes in the three pillars of conservation; art history, studio art, and chemistry. The art history requirement is less strict (most schools now accept anthropology courses), but for chemistry they want a minimum level of organic chemistry II before entering the program. Keep an eye out for the different requirements for each school as they're starting to loosen restrictions. I think some even supply a checklist, which I found really helpful. If you're looking for help with chemistry or want to watch some videos to get a one-up when you do start taking courses, [Khan Academy](#), [The Organic Chemistry Tutor](#), and [Chemistry for Conservators](#) are great.

Internships: In general, people applying to conservation graduate schools have 1-2 years of experience working full time in a conservation lab. If you're looking for experience, the first thing you can do is volunteer at your local art museum(s)! Unfortunately, much pre-program experience is unpaid, but that has started to change. Check out [WUDPAC's internship postings](#) to keep an eye out for open positions. Occasionally pre-program opportunities are listed in the job section as a technician position, or a temporary or seasonal help position (think outdoor sculpture or moving/rehousing projects.)

The **American Institute for Conservation** is the professional organization for art conservators and can be found [here](#). You can become a student member before you enter a graduate program, but it's pricey. The AIC hosts the annual meeting in a different US city every year, with the idea of alternating regions to make the meetings accessible– Midwest, Northeast, South, Southwest, Northeast, and sometimes Canada.

The [AIC Emerging Conservation Professionals Network](#) is a great way to get involved. I recommend reaching out to them, introducing yourself and seeing if there is a way to participate in any group tours/happy hours/activities.

There are four schools in the US that offer graduate degrees in conservation. They are as follows:

UCLA: Objects-based conservation school that offers both master's and PhD degrees in archeological and ethnographic objects conservation. Applications are accepted every other year (2021, 2023, 2025, etc.). I believe they only accept 5-6 students in the master's program at a time. COVID might have changed their schedule / acceptance years.

NYU: The program in NYC offers a dual degree program, so graduates receive an MS in Conservation as well as an MA in Art History. Since it is a highly art history driven program, students typically come in with a good collection of art historical writing samples from their undergraduate degree. If you're interested in going into paper/book/photo conservation, you'll have to declare that in advance during the application process. Other than that, all of the programs allow you to enter without knowing your specialization. Typically, you have to decide after your first year in the program.

SUNY Buffalo State: This is a 3-year master's program. Graduates obtain a master's in conservation as well as a certificate of advanced study (basically you can enter a PhD program

and not have to take the prerequisite courses in conservation but just dive into research). The program is based in Buffalo, but it's a part of the State University of New York school system. I'm a graduate of the program, so I'm pretty biased, but it is a great school.

[University of Delaware WUDPAC](#): This is very similar to Buffalo as it's also a 3-year degree with the same specialties offered. It is a collaborative program through the Winterthur Museum and the University of Delaware (**Winterthur University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation**). I recommend checking out their student blog under *Latest News* for more information about the students' projects and pre-program experiences. You can also subscribe to their newsletter for more information on the program.

Other Conservation Programs in North America

The [Queen's program](#) in Canada theoretically reserves a single spot for an American every year (semi-confirmed/official.) The program in Mexico City, [Escuela Nacional de Conservación, Restauración y Museografía](#), offers an undergraduate degree and a master's degree so it is (I believe) a 5-year program.

Conservation Programs Abroad

[Here's a wiki breakdown](#) of well-regarded conservation programs in other countries, in case you want to study abroad-- though those programs are just as difficult to get into and you might have some trouble job hunting once you graduate and want to return to the States as museums tend to favor US-based schools that they are more familiar with (unfortunately). One of the key differences between the American programs and those abroad is cost; American programs are fully funded, while programs abroad may incur heavy tuition costs and debt after graduation. Many of these institutions offer PhDs or fellowships, so keep them in mind for future opportunities if you pursue an American program.

The [Courtauld Institute of Art](#) in London has fantastic graduate programs in both the Conservation of Easel paintings and the Conservation of Wall Paintings, inclusive of both masters and PhD students; it is expensive and limited scholarships are available. It's a good idea to reach out to former students and ask questions about the program and the process—if you need contacts or advice, please let us know and we'd be happy to put you in touch with one of our colleagues.

I recommend going on as many lab tours as you can. Also, each school in the States has an open house in the fall where you can tour the departments and see the students' projects. They started doing virtual ones during the pandemic, but attending is a great way to meet the program directors, professors, faculty, students, *and* future students (I've met many fellow pre-program students that are now classmates/colleagues/friends).

I know this is a lot of information; I recommend saving this or tabbing the links so you can refer to them as you start on your conservation journey. It is a wonderful field to be a part of -- combining the sciences with the arts and literally touching history.

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