

A DAY IN AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSERVATION PROGRAM

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I'm a [Conservation Specialist](#) for the [UCLA/Getty Conservation Program](#), a graduate conservation training program specializing in the conservation of archaeological and ethnographic materials. In our 3 year [course](#), we train students in the methods and techniques used for the examination and preservation of objects and have them understand the properties of materials, how they deteriorate and ways to slow down or prevent further deterioration. In a typical day our students attend lectures in the morning on various aspects of conservation and then follow that in the afternoon with work in the lab. We just had an intake of a new class in the Fall of 2011 and they spent their first year learning about and working on materials such as archaeological ceramics, glass, metals, and textiles.



In one course they learned about the deterioration of archaeological ceramics and the damage caused by soluble salts. Students then determined how to identify the salts and remove them. Here a student is taking a conductivity reading of wash water as she desalinates a small ceramic vessel.



In the spring quarter students had the opportunity to learn about the conservation of archaeological textiles. They were able to examine a group pre-Columbian and Coptic textiles to understand the weaving technologies and dyes used to make them. They then learned techniques to repair and wash the textiles.



They also learned about the materials and techniques used to make ancient murals and tried their hand at making their own.

In addition to focusing on the conservation of objects in the lab, we also try to teach the students techniques they will need to conserve material in the field. This spring we held a mock excavation and buried several wall painting replicas that the students had to excavate (you can read more about that [here](#)). Once they were excavated and lifted, the students brought the wall paintings back to the lab where they continued cleaning them, determining the extent of deterioration and proposing a conservation treatment.



Here students brush off the soil from the very fragile surface of a wall painting replica. The paint was flaking off the surface and the mural seemed to show signs of salt damage. Students conducted a series of microchemical tests to identify the salts and then proposed methods to remove them and conserve the flaking paint.

By providing training on both objects in a museum collection and in the field, we are preparing our students for whatever conditions they may encounter archaeological artifacts in. We also encourage our students to go on archaeological excavations during the summers and internship periods to build on the fundamentals they learned during their courses. With the holistic approach to conservation that our curriculum takes, we are setting them on the path to becoming successful archaeological conservators.

If you are interested in becoming a conservator or want to know more about conservation, check out the [American Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works](#) for more information. They also have a page with information on [how to become a conservator](#). For information on the UCLA/Getty Conservation Program, see our [website](#).