

Contemporary North American Indigenous Knowledge at the British Library

Reference: 2021-EA-NAIS

Supervisor (name & role)	Dr Francisca Fuentes Rettig (Curator, North American Collections) Dr Cara Rodway (Assistant Head, Eccles Centre for American Studies)
Department & Site	Americas Collections & Eccles Centre, London (St Pancras)
Start date/Timeframe	Anytime from May 2021 onwards, but to be completed by March 2022 (exact start date to be agreed with the supervisor)
Duration	3 months (or part-time equivalent) For a part-time placement, the student would be required to spend a minimum of 2 days/week on the project.
Suitability for remote working	It may be possible to undertake the placement remotely, but the student would benefit from coming on site at regular intervals. To be discussed with the supervisors.

Context for placement

The Americas collection team and the Eccles Centre collaborate on projects which support and promote the British Library's North American holdings.

The curatorial team are responsible for the Library's post-1850 published collections from across the Americas. Our very broad collections remit covers research-level materials in the humanities and social sciences. On a daily basis we oversee existing collections and new acquisitions; communicate collections to the public through exhibitions, training days, and online accounts; manage collections conservation needs; develop projects to improve our holdings and readers' access to these.

The Eccles Centre promotes the Library's North American holdings, and supports researchers working on these. We also organise events and training activities. The Eccles Centre holds regular coffee mornings to bring together its research fellows working in the Library.

This project fits within a longer-term strategy to improve North American sectional holdings relating to Indigenous and First Nations peoples, and how we manage these. This includes reviewing how we work in collaboration with communities. Between the Americas and Eccles teams, we have a PhD student conducting research on North American indigenous languages holdings and support numerous research fellows who are Indigenous and/or whose work is on Indigenous Studies topics. The Eccles Centre also has a Bibliographical Editor who will offer advice about holdings and bibliographic practices. Across the wider Library, you will have access to activities such as a post-colonial reading group, and a digital humanities reading group.

Expected tasks and outcomes

1. Stage One
 - a. Research radical bibliographic practices and make recommendations for stage two.
 - b. Familiarise yourself with current British Library holdings and acquisitions practices.
 - c. Develop an understanding of Indigenous knowledge and literature, particularly in contrast to colonial collections and knowledge systems.
 - d. Conduct qualitative surveys with researchers (including Eccles fellows and non-British Library users) in these areas, and review their knowledge of and experiences using our collections.
2. Stage Two
 - a. Develop a framework for an open access bibliography of indigenous scholarship at the British Library.
 - b. Begin populating this, identify key gaps in holdings, and flag issues that arise from our acquisitions and cataloguing practices.
 - c. Identify potential contributors to the online bibliography and conduct feasibility testing.
3. Stage Three
 - a. Write a report about findings with suggestions for the future.
 - b. Draft an online guide for the British Library 'collection guides' (<https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides>).
4. Additional outputs
 - a. Contribute to the Americas & Eccles shared blog, twitter accounts, and outreach events.
 - b. Present your work internally to staff, and to the public.
 - c. Optional: Write a short article for the Electronic British Library Journal about your findings.

Training and development opportunities

All placement students are welcome to access the Library's offer of workshops, talks and training. For further details please refer to the [Application Guidelines on the British Library website](#).

In addition, this placement project will offer the following:

1. Deeper understanding of collections management and the challenges involved in ensuring diversity in collections holdings.
2. Experience of building a professional bibliography.
3. Opportunity to develop digital scholarship skills.
4. Experience of conducting qualitative research, and understanding how Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museum (GLAM) sector institutions engage with their readers to improve services.
5. Experience of creating content for an international public audience.
6. Some exposure to internal decolonising conversations in an international GLAM environment.
7. Independent working and decision making in a major public institution/independent research organisation.

Required knowledge and skills

Please ensure that you are aware of the general expectations for all applicants, as detailed in the [Application Guidelines on the British Library website](#).

For this specific project, the following additional criteria apply:

- Sensitivity to and understanding of key issues related to North American Indigenous and First Nations peoples and communities, and ability to express these with care and professionalism.
- Keen to take advantage of the opportunity to learn new digital skills.
- Comfortable discussing any challenges and/or own training needs.

Application deadline: 5pm on Friday **18 December 2020**

Further information on eligibility, conditions and how to apply is available on the British Library website: <https://www.bl.uk/news/2020/october/phd-placement-adverts-2020>