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Opinion

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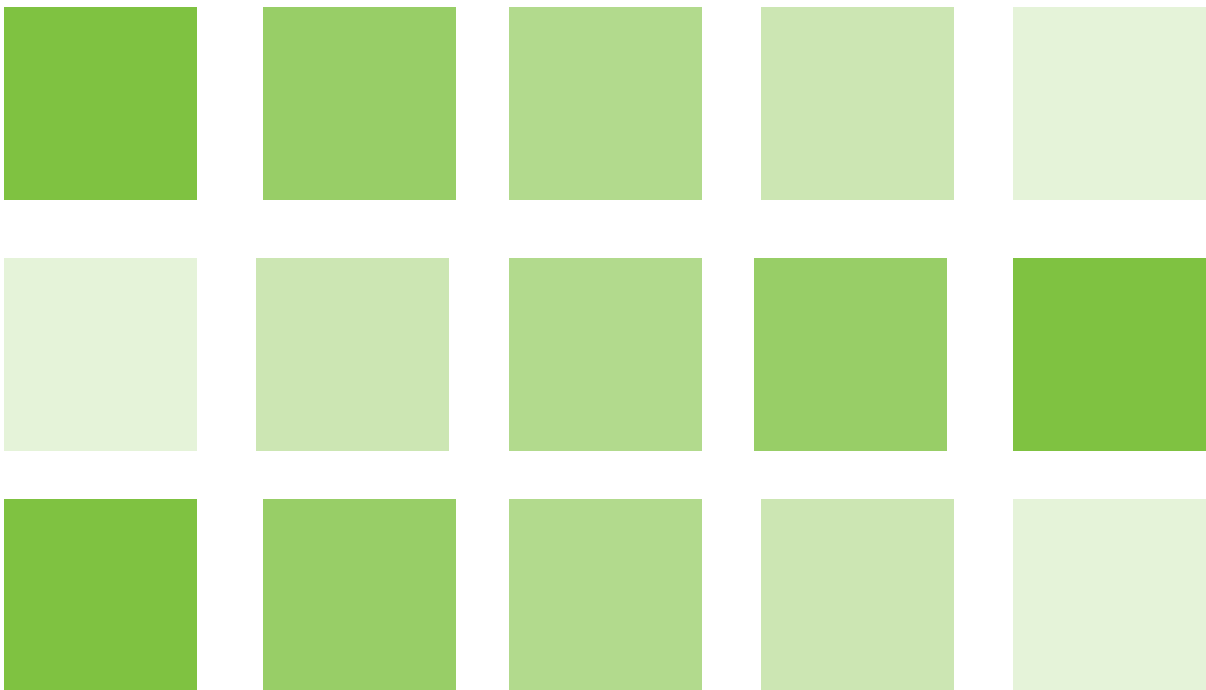
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Women in GLAM!

ACADEMIA’S UNSUNG HEROES

by Gianna Cassino | WEEKLY COLUMNIST | SHE/HER/HERS | gic23015@uconn.edu

Over the past year, I’ve developed a love of wandering museums. Art, natural history, you name it and I’m there with my camera. Despite my penchant for gaping at displays, I (like many other museum-goers) paid little mind to one key aspect: the curators. I spend a lot of time in libraries and museums but rarely take a minute to appreciate those that collected, organized and displayed their materials for public consumption. Only recently have I asked myself why that is, and how I can remedy my oversight.

Writing off the post-creation path of a sculpture or manuscript is unfortunately all-too easy. Many of us are quick to appreciate the creators of work and ignore those who cared for it after its release. We appreciate its presence in a gallery or library without any regard for how or why it appears there. It’s high time we stop attributing the painstaking art of archival curation to some invisible force and pay more attention to the unsung heroes of academia: women in GLAM.

GLAM is an abbreviation denoting galleries, libraries, archives and museums. The acronym came into play around 2010, as STEM’s artsy younger sister. In the past two years, it’s seen an online resurgence to celebrate the “women in GLAM” who make the world go around.

GLAM fields primarily differ from STEM in that they are largely female-dominated and focused behind-the-scenes. Perhaps these differences are why GLAM is looked down upon, but I am of the argument that they’re also the reasons behind its importance. Rarely do we find industries almost entirely made up of women, especially within academia. Although these women aren’t directly in

the spotlight, they are the backbone of society. Archival work spurs learning, appreciation for those who came before us and scientific innovation. Furthermore, libraries and museums (GLAM’s most accessible epicenters) serve as important third spaces. Having largely free spaces to expand one’s mind is nothing short of life-changing.

Aside from appreciating those working in GLAM, we should reinforce the validity of these careers for younger generations. Many college students pursue STEM degrees with the notion that they are the “safest” option. Progress is inevitable; there will always be high demand for people helping invent or build the next big thing. Although criminally underrated in both popular culture and academic settings alike, careers in GLAM are on the rise. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, job outlooks of archivists, curators and museum workers are expected to rise 6% in the next decade (twice as fast as most careers). With heightened demand, now is the time to train the next generation of archivists. Sure, it might seem niche. Earning a master’s in library science, for example, isn’t something your high school guidance counselor would recommend, but that’s more reason for those interested to take pursuit.

On the topic of STEM, it’s important to note that STEM and GLAM cannot exist independently. It would be asinine to ignore the past as our stepping stone to progress or the connections between art and science. Research papers cannot be written without sources collected by librarians. Bohr’s complementarity principle of quantum mechanics was partially inspired by art’s cubism movement; it couldn’t exist without the gal-



People walking around an art gallery in London. “GLAM”, Galleries, libraries, archives and museums are surging in popularity. PHOTO COURTESY OF FLICKR

lery curators who deemed cubist paintings significant enough to display. The librarians and archivists storing and sorting information enable us to learn from our past. Undermining the importance of GLAM could have devastating impacts on society’s ability to advance.

As sappy as it sounds, if you’re thinking of pursuing a career in GLAM, let this be your sign. Librarian or archivist jobs

may not be publicized at career fairs or create millionaires, but that doesn’t mean they’re any less valuable than engineering or accounting. Our world is changing in unprecedented ways, and we need a competent group of minds to sift through the data. At the end of the day, archival work is more than just sifting through dusty artifacts or clicking through webpages; it’s crafting a legacy.



The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Jobs in galleries, libraries, archives and museums make up an area of under appreciated female-dominated fields. PHOTO COURTESY BILL GRACEY ON FLICKR