

Dr. Silke Zoller (Former Davis Fellow) Reflections on the Davis Fellowship

Editor’s note: I first connected with Dr. Silke Zoller through a shared interest in Pan American Airways. After attending an online showcase she delivered, moderated by the University of Miami’s Special Collections, I had the opportunity to speak with her about her work and experience as a former Davis Fellow. That conversation led me to invite her to reflect on her experience at CENFAD.



Dr. Silke Zoller: 2014 was a big year for me. I was preparing for my comprehensive exams, and at the same time narrowing down the subject matter for my dissertation enough to create a feasible project for the

upcoming years. In the middle of this preparation, I learned that I had won the 2014-2015 Thomas J. Davis Fellowship. This position became fundamental to my development as a historian. As a Davis fellow, I learned so much about how the academic world works while building networks that I still rely on today.

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The Davis fellowship introduced me to many of the routines of academia. This knowledge became invaluable for my dissertation and job market participation. I edited *Strategic Visions*, organized the CENFAD speaker series logistics, and participated in more amazing post-talk

dinners than I can remember. *Strategic Visions* taught me what to look out for in academic work. In turn, I began tailoring my own writing to be precise, clearer, and (to a crucial extent) diplomatic. For the speaker series, what I found most important were the conversations before and after formal talks. Every speaker took time, I remember, to answer my endless questions about how they arrived at their research topic, how their thesis came together, and what the best ways were to approach archival research. One even later joined my dissertation committee (many thanks, Dr. Fioretos!). During the post-talk dinners hosted by the indefatigable Dr. Immerman, I had the opportunity to listen as the speakers and Temple University professors discussed research travel, conferences, book publishers, historiography, and many crucial topics in depth. That information gave me a lot of confidence as I set out on my own work. I defended my dissertation proposal and went on my first archive trip to Detroit in 2015, and felt like I actually knew what I was doing.

As the Davis fellow, I was also in the heart of the CENFAD community. Because of the position, I became much more assertive than I might have been about speaking to Temple's visiting and affiliated scholars, with enriching results. I also built a network of fellow graduate students who cheered me on and offered crucial advice at just the right moment. Shoutouts to Manna Duah, Carly

Goodman, Timothy Sayle, Thomas Reinstein, Sarah Robey, Paul Braff, Tyler Bamford, Steven Elliott, Matthew Faye, and so many others. I would apologize for hounding all of you to tell me more about your grants and achievements, but I am not actually sorry. Many people I still turn to for help today, for example to look over pieces that I am thinking about publishing, or when I need a victim to write for the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations' *Passport* newsletter, which I co-edit.

CENFAD in general and the Davis fellowship in particular set me up to succeed as a scholar. I do not know what my dissertation or research would have been like without these opportunities.

Dr. Silke Zoller is an assistant professor of history at Kennesaw State University and the co-editor of *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review*. Her book *To Deter and Punish: Global Collaboration Against Terrorism in the 1970s* appeared in 2021 with Columbia University Press. She holds a Ph.D. from Temple University and has had postdoctoral fellowships at the Clements Center for National Security at the University of Texas at Austin and the John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College.