

# CENFAD at Temple and Beyond

## CENFAD Emerging Scholar: Ella Scalese



I first started working in museums when I was fourteen, at a historic house museum named Peter Wentz Farmstead in the suburbs of Philadelphia. That three-year volunteer experience, where I interpreted the historic home dressed in costume for event days and assisted with children’s summer camp programming, fostered what would be a lifelong interest in museums — more specifically, museums within Philadelphia. Philadelphia is uniquely situated in the public historical landscape, its history so rich that museums often struggle to define it by a singular narrative. Do we view Philadelphia as the birthplace of the nation, a site of nineteenth-century immigration and racial tensions, a space for largely uninterpreted queer history, or simply the bustling city of today? And as a city populated by various historical, art, history, and science museums, how does each museum claim and develop its specific narrative niche?

These questions first drew me to Temple, inspiring me to explore public historical questions from a location in the city’s

heart. As a museum educator, the prospect of taking classes focused on public history and museums surrounded by the types of institutions I wanted to study excited me. My undergraduate studies focused on the balance between education and entertainment in *Body Worlds* (currently on view at the Franklin Institute!), an exhibition of preserved bodies developed by Gunther von Hagens in the late twentieth century. Its fame sparked imitation exhibitions, which swirled with controversy over the alleged sourcing of cadavers from Chinese political prisoners. The exhibition, embroiled in questions of whether human remains are acceptable for educating or entertaining in a “freak-show”-esque spectacle, inspired further research.

Bringing this research topic to the graduate level and locating it specifically within the city, I am currently researching the development of anatomy museums within nineteenth-century Philadelphia. Drawing mainly on primary source archival material from the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Kislak Center for Special Collections, my work examines the function of education and entertainment within the city’s anatomy museums. In doing so, I look at their marketing, history, and intended museumgoer’s experience, concluding by making connections to the contemporary *Body Worlds* exhibition.

The two nineteenth-century museums used as case studies in my research are the nineteenth-century Wistar and Horner Museum and the 807 Chestnut Street Museum, the former intended as educational training for anatomy students and the latter intended as “freak-show”-style entertainment. These museums were not solely Philadelphia but globally engaged in public interest and outcry. As anatomical education

increased and museums and universities opened, resurrectionists (gravediggers) needed to supply cadavers to fit the growing demand for dissecting classes at anatomical schools. Occurring in both London and Philadelphia, frequent grave robbing led to the creation of legislation regarding the types of graves that could be legally robbed; often, these were public graves of the poor and marginalized.

Embedded in the beginnings of the anatomy museum is a legal and social history demonstrating that the anatomy museum is inseparable from the abuse of the marginalized, spanning from the use of almshouse graves to source bodies for the Wistar and Horner Museum to pseudoscientific racial categorizations at the 807 Chestnut Street Museum. To understand this history is to contextualize contemporary human remains controversies and how the mismanagement of human remains was naturalized within museums. Philadelphia's museums persist as centers of human remains controversies, such as the Morton Collection skulls, the remains of the MOVE bombing victims, and Mütter Museum specimens. This history is an indication that harming the marginalized was never a side effect of anatomy museums — it was implanted in their missions, and its undoing will require explicit reckoning with the past.

Throughout this research and my time at Temple, I have been grateful for the guidance of Dr. Bruggeman and Dr. Lowe. In Dr. Bruggeman's class *Managing History*, we are working to understand the question: Why can't Philadelphia have its own history museum? Answering this question necessitates a thorough understanding of Philadelphia's historical, cultural, and non-profit environment, knowledge that has influenced my research outside of the class. Rather than looking at anatomy museums as isolated institutions, I have been better

equipped to analyze them as entities in both Philadelphian and global ecosystems.

I am endlessly grateful for the research and opportunities I have been able to pursue as a CENFAD Emerging Scholar, from pursuing my research, attending CENFAD talks with engaging speakers, and presenting at the Barnes Conference, to all of the exciting things on the horizon. I have recently been intertwining my interests in force and diplomacy and museums, beginning work at the Independence Seaport Museum as a Shipboard Educator. Through this experience, I have been learning more about how diplomacy and war are interpreted by museums as institutions at large, and by museum educators specifically. The Independence Seaport Museum, which is centered around the USS Olympia (Spanish-American War cruiser) and the USS Becuna (World War II and Cold War submarine), provides a public-facing example to explore how the history of force and diplomacy is interpreted. This experience has assisted me in framing museums as nuanced spaces where force and diplomacy can be discussed, examining topics such as: how submariners on the Becuna during WWII experienced war differently than those in command positions, the way in which Olympia and Becuna have been deployed internationally but came to rest locally in Philadelphia, and how marine vessels are interpreted as locations with which people interact rather than isolated artifacts.

Looking towards the future, this coming summer, I will be presenting my research in Germany through the Erfurt Exchange Program, getting feedback on the development of German anatomy museums, and completing the Martin Levitt Fellowship at the American Philosophical Society in assisting their preparations for the 250th celebration. As I wrap up my first year at Temple, I am eager to see what the second will bring!

## From *Taken* to Temple: Abby Lewis and the Expanding Vision of the Center for European Studies



*Abby Lewis on fellowship in Jerusalem, 2020.*

When Abby Lewis prepared for her very first trip abroad—a summer research program in Paris as an undergraduate student at UNC-Chapel Hill—her mother, nervous about international travel, insisted she watch the movie *Taken*. It was her mom’s way of preparing her daughter for the unknown. “She tried to explain that this was just like real life,” Lewis recalls with a laugh. “I had never even been on a plane, didn’t know how airport security worked, and had no idea how to get from the airport to my apartment.”

That summer in 2010 marked Abby’s first time leaving the U.S., her first solo travel experience, and the beginning of what would become a lifelong commitment to European studies—and to helping others access the transformative power of global learning.

Now, fifteen years and several countries later, Dr. Lewis is the Executive Director of the **Council for European Studies (CES)** at Temple University and [collaborating with](#)

[CENFAD](#). She brings with her not just a deep academic background in European history and the Second World War, but also a personal mission to open doors for students whose backgrounds might mirror her own: curious, ambitious, but not born into the privileges that make international travel easy.

Growing up in North Carolina in the 1990s, Lewis saw international travel as a distant dream. “My parents have never had passports,” she says. “Our vacations were road trips to visit family in Virginia. But from the moment I got to college, I knew I wanted to see more of the world.” Financial obstacles meant she couldn’t join traditional study abroad programs—but an undergraduate research grant made her dream possible, and everything changed.

“That summer in Paris was terrifying, lonely, and completely life-changing,” she says. “It was the first time I was really independent. I didn’t know anyone. I barely spoke the language. But I also grew more during those eight weeks than in maybe any other period of my life.”

The experience didn’t just shift her worldview—it set her academic and professional course. From that initial summer in Paris, to a language program in Berlin, to archival research in Israel and France, Lewis’s path has been guided by curiosity, resourcefulness, and a passion for connection across borders.

After completing her Ph.D. in History at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 2022, Lewis joined the Nanovic Institute for European Studies at the University of Notre Dame as Director of Undergraduate Studies and a postdoctoral research associate. There, she managed international programming and oversaw undergraduate research grants—work that affirmed her love for helping students travel, study, and grow through immersive experiences abroad.

That same commitment now shapes her work at CES, which she joined in August 2024 during a major institutional transition. Originally founded in 1970 as a consortium of U.S.-based European Studies centers, CES has grown into a global organization with over a thousand members spanning Europe, North America, and beyond. In recent years, CES made the move from Columbia University to Temple—a shift Lewis was hired to help navigate.

“It’s exciting because I was new to the organization at the same time CES was new to Temple,” she explains. “As I was introducing myself to students, faculty, and staff, I was also introducing CES. That sense of ‘newness’ created space for a lot of energy and ideas.”

At its core, CES is a membership-based academic organization dedicated to strengthening the field of European studies through research, programming, and networking. It offers prestigious grants and prizes, supports thematic research networks, and runs one of the largest European studies conferences in the world. And this year, for the first time, that conference is coming to Temple University.

The [31st International Conference of Europeanists](#) will be held from June 25–27, 2025 and promises to be a landmark event. With participants traveling from across Europe, North America, and beyond, the conference will feature keynote addresses, interdisciplinary panels, roundtables on pressing topics like “Europe in the Second Trump Era,” and even film screenings focused on Black identity in Renaissance Italy. A keynote by the EU’s Deputy Ambassador to the U.S., Ruth Bajada, is among the highlights. “It’s going to be an incredible week,” Lewis says. “And the fact that it’s happening at Temple is a big deal.”

That spirit of global exchange—centered

at Temple but reaching far beyond—makes CES a natural partner for other academic institutions on campus, including CENFAD. With shared interests in European history, diplomacy, conflict, and global networks, Abby sees major potential in future collaborations.

“We’d love to co-sponsor lectures, events, even research fellowships with CENFAD,” she says. “There’s so much alignment between what we both care about. As a historian of World War II, I’m personally drawn to CENFAD’s mission. I think together we could build something really meaningful for students and faculty alike.”

That focus on students is central to Lewis’s vision for CES at Temple. Beyond conferences and high-level research, she wants to ensure that the center is a resource for students across the university, especially those who, like her younger self, might need a little help navigating international opportunities.



*Abby Lewis researching abroad in Paris, 2015.*

“Study abroad isn’t accessible to everyone, and I know that firsthand,” she says. “One of my biggest goals is to expand grant funding and launch more ‘beyond the classroom’ initiatives—things like short faculty-led

trips, weekend excursions in Europe, or small research fellowships that make these experiences possible for more students.”

She dreams of seeing CES grow into a truly global hub, with institutional members across continents, regional affiliates, and robust travel funding that supports real immersion—not just academic credit. “These experiences shape students in ways they don’t even realize until later. Even if they never go to grad school, it leaves a mark.”

That awareness has shaped her own professional journey. Like many Ph.D.s of her generation, Lewis entered graduate school with the dream of becoming a professor. But after years on the academic job market, she found herself drawn toward administrative work that still allowed her to use her research skills—but in more collaborative, dynamic ways.

“I worried that if I didn’t get a tenure-track job, I’d feel unfulfilled or like I hadn’t succeeded,” she admits. “But what I’ve found is that I use the skills I gained during my Ph.D. all the time. I still feel like an academic. And I actually think I’m having a bigger impact in this role than I would have otherwise.”

That impact is growing—both through CES’s expanding presence at Temple and through Lewis’s efforts to connect CES to broader global networks. Already, she’s imagining future hubs in Montreal, Amsterdam, and Tokyo, and working to build programming with Temple Japan. A lecture series is in the works. And so is a deeper footprint in Philadelphia’s vibrant academic community.

“I want CES to be visible on campus and in the city. I want it to feel like something students and faculty are a part of, not something separate from them.”

Reflecting on her journey—from a small-town childhood with no passports to a leadership role shaping international scholarship—Lewis is quick to point out that success doesn’t always follow a straight line.

“I think if you told 18-year-old me that I’d end up doing this, I would have been amazed. I’ve gotten to live abroad, support student research, build programs, and engage with scholars all over the world. That’s more than I ever imagined.”

And perhaps most importantly, she’s creating the kinds of opportunities she once feared she might miss. The work may not always look like the traditional academic path, but it’s no less meaningful.

“I’ve found the best of both worlds,” she says. “And I want to help others find that too.”