At 21 years old, Rayna Mathis, a recent graduate from the Department of History, is off to a fantastic start in her career. She graduated in the Spring of 2016 at just 20 years old, having already launched her career as a museum professional. Rayna currently works as Coordinator for School and Educator Programs at the Seattle Art Museum (SAM), a position she has held since May of 2016.

Her position primarily involves working with schools and educators, but she has also had the opportunity to work with a program called Design Your Neighborhood, a community outreach program in which teens work together to redesign a community space. Through a series of workshops, young people are immersed in all aspects of design from learning about art and architecture to doing the work of planning, budgeting, and executing the final project. "The program gives teens a lot of agency," she said, "I feel very lucky that I get to be a part of things like that."

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In the short time she has worked at SAM, Rayna has excelled at her job, and has taken on additional responsibilities, including assisting docent trainings. Still, she admits that she was a little intimidated at first: "I thought I had to ‘know’ art. My interests and talent all come from History, and this has made me a little self-conscious in the art world." In fact, her training in History may have helped her land the job in the first place. She started as an intern at SAM in September 2015, just before the beginning of her senior year at UW. "My manager said the reason she chose me was because she knew that, as a history major, I would know how to conduct research and would be happy researching and writing for hours on end," she explained, "And she was right!" As Rayna has expanded further into the educational aspects of museums, she finds herself using other skills from her historical training. "I can't tell you the difference between printmaking techniques or lead an art workshop for students yet," she said, "but I can tell you why the art is important or why an artist was revolutionary. I can provide context for that."
When asked if she had any advice for students interested in pursuing a career in museums, Rayna replied that she strongly encourages internships like the one she began with at SAM while still an undergraduate. At that point, she said, she was still trying to figure out what to do with her degree. When she heard about the internship program at SAM she thought, "Why not? I'll give it a shot." It turns out the museum was a great fit, and when the quarter ended, she asked to stay on. SAM was happy to have her, and eventually offered her the full-time position she now enjoys. Even if the internship doesn't turn into a job offer, she pointed out, it's an important first step in building your network and determining if this is a career you can be passionate about.

Eventually Rayna hopes to go to graduate school to study Museum Education.

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