

ITP Annual Programme 2025 Report

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Supported by the Edith Murphy Foundation

If you had told me three years ago that I'd be working at the Bishop Museum, I would've called you crazy. A year ago, if you'd said I'd be spending my summer at the British Museum, I would've laughed. And six months ago, if you'd told me I'd become the first Data Manager of Ethnology and Archaeology at my institution, I simply wouldn't have believed you.



The work I do at Bishop Museum can be best described in Hawaiian as kuleana. This word carries layers of cultural and spiritual significance. At its core, kuleana translates to responsibility, right, and privilege. A person's kuleana may be tied to the 'āina (land), the kaiaulu (Hawaiian community), and the 'ohana (family unit). It is not merely a duty, it is a responsibility that comes with honor and trust. To have kuleana is to be entrusted with something meaningful. Kuleana is also a form of personal accountability. It reflects your role in maintaining balance within your life and the world around you. Yet, knowing your kuleana isn't always obvious. Sometimes, it requires you to be observant, to listen deeply, to interpret, and to reflect. Your kuleana calls out to you.

I carry many different types of kuleana, but the one I'm most honored to hold is my kuleana to my kaiaulu (community) and my kūpuna (ancestors): to care for the material heritage and cultural resources of Hawai'i and the Pacific at Bishop Museum.

In this instance, I like to think that my kuleana found me.

Although I studied Hawaiian culture and Anthropology, I never imagined myself working in a museum. It wasn't something I aspired to. That changed in 2022, when I was invited to attend a collections tour at Bishop Museum. During the tour, we were coincidentally shown items connected to my family. When I began reciting names from several generations back, the curator's face lit up. She told me she had another collection of items from my great-great-grand aunt, Stella Hanohano, that were on long-term loan. She had recently been working through the paperwork and hoped to return the items to our family.

My eyes watered. I immediately asked if I could volunteer and be part of the process. That moment marked the beginning of my museum career. From that instance, I felt deeply connected to collections and was determined to find a way to contribute to its care.

Although I wasn't new to research or material culture, museums were unfamiliar territory. I was fortunate, or perhaps blessed, that my strong foundation in Hawaiian culture, combined with over a year of volunteer experience at the museum, led to a full-time position in the Informatics department. I didn't have formal training in information science or data management, but I trusted that my aloha for my culture and my kupuna would guide me wherever I went. I believe others saw that in me too.

I never imagined I would grow to love my job as deeply as I do now. I've learned so much and remain eager to continually improve myself so I can better support my institution. So, when the ITP program was introduced to me, I knew I had to apply. The ITP program has opened so many doors for me while in London and here at home. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to have participated and engaged in experiences that still continually allows me to fulfill kuleana to Bishop Museum.

On the most granular level, I found it incredibly valuable to be exposed to such a wide variety of museums. Observing how each institution organizes and operates offered me a rich spectrum of perspectives to compare with my home institution—some were familiar, some offered inspiring practices to adopt, and others (like all of us) are still figuring it out. It was reassuring to recognize shared challenges across the board and to witness firsthand that museums around the world grapple with similar issues, regardless of their size or scope.

I truly experienced this during my time in Norwich with the Norfolk Museum Service (NMS). I had a fantastic time with Louisa Wickham, Teaching Museum Manager and Jo Warr, Head of Development, who were exceptionally welcoming to all of us. It was enlightening to receive an introduction to such a diverse array of museums, to learn about their scopes, the forces that shape their collections, and the ways they engage with their communities. Even more rewarding was discovering how these institutions operate not only individually, but also collaboratively as a unified network. Norfolk museums and the city of Norwich felt incredibly inviting and cozy—almost like a second home. There's much to learn from their training programs and youth engagement strategies, which left a lasting impression on me.

The presentations that I found most useful for my direct responsibilities were those from the documentation team, collections management team, leadership training by Xerxes Mazda, Director of Collections at the British Museum, and a handful of one-on-one meetings that were organized by the Oceania department.

I thoroughly enjoyed hearing from the documentation team, as their department closely aligns with the one I work in. I was especially interested in how they're structured, the size of their team, their roles and responsibilities, their priorities, and how they accomplish their work. Naturally, not all my questions could be answered in the session, so I was truly appreciative that Inga Edwardson, Inventory Manager, and Maria Duarte, Catalogue Manager, met with me for lunch the following day. I'm grateful for their time, their honesty, and their willingness to share—again, we're all just figuring it out.

The British Museum's effort to conduct a full audit of its collections doesn't rest solely on collections and curatorial staff; documentation staff play a vital role in supporting and driving this work. Bishop Museum is undertaking similar efforts to inventory specific collections, and since I help manage our database, I'm often the point person for organizing inventory workflows. Inga and Maria generously shared the processes they've developed, along with personal tips and tricks. I'm thankful for their insights and know that the time spent with them has fostered a relationship that will continue to be a resource for me beyond the program. I only hope that one day I'll have something valuable to share with them in return.

Hearing from the collections department was incredibly valuable. Since collections form the heart of any museum, I believe it's essential to learn best practices from other institutions. This session was especially meaningful to me because collections care is an area where I have the least formal training. I truly appreciated the opportunity for hands-on experience with object pinning, mount making, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), crating, large object movements, and condition checks—all practical skills that significantly enhance my understanding and capabilities in collections care.



One of the sessions that resonated with me most was led by Xerxes Mazda, Director of Collections. He shared key characteristics he believes are essential in a leader, offering a framework that deeply inspired me. According to him, there are four qualities he looks for in a person:

1. **Subject knowledge** – a strong foundation in one’s area of expertise.
2. **Vision** – someone who can help maintain direction and guide others toward meaningful goals.
3. **Positivity** – a resilient spirit that keeps moving forward despite challenges.
4. **Partnership** – an understanding that leadership is collaborative, and no one can do it all alone.

His insight provided a blueprint I now carry with me as I strive to become a better leader. It reminded me that leadership isn’t just about authority—it’s about clarity, perseverance, and humility.

I also had the opportunity to meet with Claudia Zhert, who supports data and documentation within the Oceania department, and Vicky Donnellan, the former Inventory Manager and an incredible resource for data management. I’m deeply appreciative of the time they spent with me and their openness in answering all my questions. I especially enjoyed learning about their data projects, including the Google Arts collaboration and the integration of Hawaiian language into collection names—initiatives that deeply resonate with my own cultural values and professional interests. I’m sincerely grateful for their generosity and insight.

The ITP has significantly strengthened my confidence in my work. It connected me with like-minded professionals whose insights and experiences have helped me grow both personally and professionally. Knowing that I can continue to lean on this network for support has made me feel more empowered and ambitious about what I can accomplish within my organization. I look forward to the opportunity to give back to this network in the future, just as it has generously supported me.

Being part of this program also demonstrated to my institution that I’m deeply committed to the work I do. I believe the ITP played a pivotal role in my being offered a managerial position while I was in London. Upon returning to Bishop Museum, I stepped into a newly created role as Cultural Resources Data Manager. It’s incredibly affirming to see that Bishop Museum values this experience and is entrusting me with this responsibility.

In Hawaiian culture, knowing our mo’okū’auhau (genealogy) is deeply important. From a young age, I was drawn to the stories of my kūpuna (ancestors), always seeking them out and feeling their presence guiding me along the path meant for me.

Before arriving in London, I felt a profound sense of comfort and relief knowing that my great-great-great-grandfather, Abraham Pi’ianai’a (father of Stella Hanohano), had once walked these same streets. In 1880, under the direction of King Kalākaua and the Hawaiian government, he

was selected to study abroad as part of the Hawaiian Youths Abroad Program—a visionary initiative meant to empower young Hawaiians with global knowledge to bring home and share with their people.



As I embarked on my own journey of learning and growth, I couldn't help but feel that he wanted me to be here too—to experience, to absorb, and to contribute, just as he did. His legacy is not just a story from the past; it's a living reminder that I carry with me, shaping the way I move through the world.

It is through these personal experiences that I attempt to convey just how transformative my summer with the ITP program truly was. I learned so much about myself—about who I am and where I want to be. I formed meaningful friendships and experienced real growth in my career. My time in London didn't just support my professional development; it offered experiences that continue to deepen my sense of identity and strengthen my connection to my 'ohana, my kaiaulu, and my kūpuna. I never imagined I would gain so much while being so far from home.

I am profoundly grateful for this experience and would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the British Museum for hosting such an incredible, life-changing program; to the ITP team—Claire Messenger, George Peckham, and Amelia Kedge—for being the most generous and supportive hosts; and to the Edith Murphy Foundation, whose generosity and belief in my passions made this journey possible.

Mahalo for allowing me to fulfill my kuleana.