Alumni Spotlight: Nina Cavazos

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First, I wonder if you could tell me a little about your position at the National Women’s History Museum. It looks like an amazing organization. How did you end up there, what is your position, and how do you spend your days?

I am the Manager of Stakeholder Engagement at the National Women’s History Museum (NWHM). NWHM is a non-profit working to build a women’s history museum on or near the National Mall, and we have active legislation in both the House and Senate that would determine a location on the Mall for the museum. However, we firmly believe that we don’t need a physical building to celebrate women’s history, so in the meantime we acknowledge that hidden history through digital exhibits, integrating women’s history into classroom and curricula, and honoring contemporary women who are making an impact in their field. I first came to the organization in November 2016 as a Membership Associate. I managed their 55,000+ Charter Membership program by overseeing all donations and acknowledgements, writing grant proposals, and working with others in the Development Department to cultivate major, corporate, and foundation donors. Since I started, I founded Council XIX, a movement of young visionaries who support the Museum’s efforts with their passionate voices and diverse leadership. Council XIX is about harnessing the power of young leaders and empowering them to help NWHM move into a future that includes all voices. We have experienced tremendous momentum with the Council, and because of that, I am transitioning into my current role where I take a more active part in helping build NWHM’s brand within a younger audience through developing fundraising and awareness campaigns, cultivating relationships with partners that speak to a younger generation, and driving membership to both Council XIX and the Museum’s Charter Membership program.

What do you love most about the museum? Any particular exhibits, articles, events, etc. you wish more people knew about?

I love our mission. I get to wake up every day and fight for the recognition women deserve, and that is awesome. I wish more people knew that there is no museum in Washington, DC solely dedicated to the history of women’s accomplishments and contributions to our nation; it’s so crazy that the museum doesn’t exist yet, and most people are under the impression that it is already there! All of our online exhibits are really good, especially our resource center on the history of women’s suffrage, called Crusade for the Vote.

How did your time at USU help prepare you for the current work you’re doing? Are there any specific skills that have been useful to you?

The History Department and my graduate work really prepared me to be a better writer and turned me into someone who can produce really good work within a very short timeframe, which has helped when I am preparing presentations for stakeholders, producing communications, and writing grant proposals. Also, as funny as it is, working on a grad student budget is VERY helpful in preparing you to enter the non-profit sector. So often I am planning an event or working on a campaign with little funds, and the whole spirit of “let’s just make it work” makes you find creative solutions.

What year did you graduate from USU and what was your major/field of interest?
I graduated with a Master’s in the Science of History in May 2016; my thesis examined the artistic trends and women’s religious practices associated with prayer books produced in the Kashmir Valley during the 19th century.

**What was your favorite part of being a student at USU?**

I really appreciated how much time and space I was afforded as a graduate student to think critically, approach my thesis in a creative way, and prioritize my own work before everything else. The Archives and Special Collections allowed me to do a special exhibit on the 19th-century Kashmiri prayer book (called a *gutka*) which helped me think about my research in a much more dynamic way, and I was also able to present that research during the USU Ignite series. The History Department and faculty were so supportive, and really helped me explore all opportunities available.

**Was there a particular mentor or professor who inspired you when you were a student here? Can you talk a little about that?**

I worked closely with Dr. Ravi Gupta – I was both his graduate research assistant and was one of the graduate thesis projects he helped steer. I knew him when I was an undergraduate student at the College of William and Mary, and I was able to come to USU to continue my work with him. Dr. Gupta was incredibly warm and supportive of everything I was working on while at USU, and I really admired how he worked hard in his professional life but made no compromises when it came to his family.

**What are you passionate about, other than history?**

I am passionate about women! But I am sure that is pretty obvious by now. I also enjoy traveling, cooking, reading, writing, and going to museums.