



## Hilldale scholar Brontë Mansfield encourages other students to apply

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Brontë Mansfield, a senior Art History and English major from Clinton, Wisconsin, has just three words for students considering applying for the Hilldale Undergraduate/Faculty Research Fellowship:

“Go for it.”

Mansfield points to her whirlwind summer of 2014, funded largely in part by the 2014 Hilldale Fellowship, as the reason why she encourages students to apply for the award. She spent weeks at various museums in England, as well as at the Yale Center for British Art, studying nineteenth century depictions of mermaids.

This research goes back to a term paper Mansfield wrote for an art history seminar her junior year. In the paper, Mansfield discussed a work from the UW archives called “Chasing Tail.” It was this experience that sparked her interest in mermaids and their depiction in British art in the nineteenth century.

By her senior year, Mansfield knew that she wanted to write her senior thesis on the topic. However, she also knew that her research would be incomplete without a trip to England to study the art in person. There, she would be able to explore famous British art museums and have the opportunity to examine many archived pieces that are not on display.



**Brontë Mansfield receives her 2014 Hilldale Award from Chancellor Rebecca Blank.**

In hopes of being selected as a Hilldale scholar and having the ability to fund some of her trip, Mansfield applied for the award.

Mansfield says that she quickly learned that the application process was just as valuable as the check that would be awarded to winners. According to Mansfield, you learn early how to communicate with your advisor and coordinate successfully with him or her. Mansfield also says that the process forced her to articulate her research ideas early and to write an abstract when her ideas were only half-formed.

“Even if you don’t win, applying is a good dry run for learning how to write proposals



and complete applications like that,” Mansfield said. “And those skills are also something that will be valuable to take with you into the world.”

Mansfield is especially an advocate for students in the humanities to apply for the Hilldale Fellowship. She says she feels that the award is less-known in the humanities, and she believes that research in the humanities presents a unique opportunity for students.

“The cool thing about the humanities is that it is very much your own,” Mansfield said. “You aren’t collaborating with other researchers in a lab. You get to choose a topic that interests you and then go off and do your own research on it.”

However, Mansfield says that research in the humanities can be challenging. She likens her research to scientific experimentation in that you make a hypothesis about what you’re going to find, but you must run a test to get actual results. In her case, Mansfield says that she developed suspicions about the artwork that she would find, but had to see it in person in order to confirm her beliefs.

Without seeing art in person, Mansfield says that one can play a guessing game about what will and what will not be found in the archive. She learned this firsthand at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, where she had the chance to look at an entire album of mermaid paraphernalia that had not been listed on the museum’s website. This is one of the many unique opportunities with which the Hilldale funds provided her.

“My research that I initially proposed, and am carrying out for my senior thesis, has greatly benefitted from all the things I was able to learn and discover on my trip,” Mansfield said.

In addition to funding her whirlwind trip around England, as well as to New Haven, Connecticut, Hilldale funds were also used to send Mansfield to the North American Victorian Studies Association national conference in London, Ontario. At the NAVSA conference, Mansfield says she was inspired by listening to scholars at the very top of her field. Their discussion of how they write papers has informed how her thesis is being written, and one scholar’s research even helped her come to a revelation about her thesis as a whole.

Now that Mansfield’s research has wrapped up, she is working on putting that senior thesis together. She is also in the process of applying to PhD programs. As a 2014 Beinecke Scholar, Mansfield has been awarded \$34,000 for graduate study. She will begin her endeavor either this fall or the next.

Mansfield says that she is immensely grateful for the opportunities afforded to her by the Hilldale Fellowship and other scholarships, and she encourages all students to apply.

“Everything you learn, from the application to the very end, is really worth the effort and time.”