

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING WITH THE SMITHSONIAN: CREATING CLASSROOM CONVERSATIONS THAT FOSTER A HOPEFUL FUTURE TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD**

The Smithsonian Institution is on the move. Long known as a showcase that glorifies the past, the Smithsonian, the largest museum, education, and research complex in the world, today is tackling weighty and complex topics such as climate change, biodiversity, exploration of the universe. In addition, it is enlarging historical narratives, including “reckoning with our racial past,” and aims to help shape a promising future for the U.S. and far beyond.

More than 177 years after its founding, the Smithsonian remains dedicated to “learning, dialogue, and creative outcomes.” It aims to use its vast resources to attract and empower seekers and learners in communities near and far with 21 museums, two in the planning stages (The National Museum of the American Latino and The American Women’s History Museum), one zoo, an estimated 157.2 million museum objects and specimens, almost 3 million library volumes, 44,000 cubic feet of archival material, and 9.9 million digital records in The Collections Search Center. In addition, there are eight Smithsonian research centers, 14 research programs, and The Learning Lab, a free, interactive platform that puts the treasures of the Smithsonian within reach by offering a one-stop shop for discovering millions of authentic digital resources and creating content with online tools.

Today’s Smithsonian aims to become an education center with the tools and information needed to forge its two, five-year Strategic Plans. For the last five years, the Institution has been guided by its 2017 Strategic Plan, which created a new pathway that aimed to foster “Greater Reach, Greater Relevance, Profound Impact” with five Grand Challenges: Magnifying the Transformative Power of Arts and Design, Unlocking the Mysteries of the Universe, Understanding and Sustaining a Biodiverse Planet, Visiting World Cultures, and Understanding the American Experience.

Launched in late 2022 is a second Strategic Plan, “Smithsonian 2027: Our Shared Future,” which is focused on the Smithsonian’s aspirations, priorities, and planned impact as the Institution continues to transform to meet the challenges and opportunities of a changing world. The new Plan centers on five focus areas:

--Digital: ensure every home and classroom has access to the Smithsonian’s digital content

--Nimble: Work together to build a nimble and effective Smithsonian.

--Trusted Source: Be a trusted source that explores and grapples with what it means to be an American.

--Science: Harness Smithsonian Expertise to elevate science in the global discourse.

--Education: Build and enrich a national culture of learning by engaging with educational systems nationwide.

Montgomery College (MC) and the Smithsonian Faculty Fellowships (SFF) have played a special role in the Smithsonian story since 1998, with 235 of our professors from varied disciplines on all three campuses and more than 25,000 of our students--not to mention faculty, friends, and families--entering Smithsonian museums as part of the Smithsonian Faculty Fellowship program. MC remains the only community college with such a relationship with the Smithsonian. MC participants learn from the extraordinary Smithsonian visits and exhibits that become part of their classroom conversation, whether in person or virtual, as demonstrated in our students' imaginative course projects. MC is the most diverse community college in the continental U.S., and over the years, our SFF faculty and students have contributed mightily to telling their stories, gleaning and sharing new discoveries, and expanding their horizons from out-of-the classroom into life-changing museum experiences.

This year's theme surely will create "endless possibilities" for professors from varied disciplines on all three campuses. Simply put, there is something for everyone! The 2024 Smithsonian Faculty Fellows --and their students--will be the beneficiaries of knowledge and inspiration from various arms of the Smithsonian, including from museum curators and museum educators, who will lend their immense knowledge and expertise with our new Fellows about exciting and stimulating exhibits in a variety of selected Smithsonian museums, which could include:

--Three ongoing exhibits in **The National Museum of American History**: (1) The permanent exhibit *Many Voices, One Nation* unravels America's story from early Spanish and Native American history, through to massive influxes from Europe, into modern times. The exhibit includes a section of the Border Wall between Mexico and the United States, accompanied by nameless personal items abandoned in the deserts of the Southwest. Of immense help to our professors will be an accompanying teacher resource guide *Becoming US* to enrich school curricular for "a more accurate and inclusive migration and immigration narrative."

--(2) Another major resource also tucked into the **National Museum of American History** is the Molina Family Latino Gallery, the first physical presence of the long-anticipated National Museum of the American Latino, set to open on or near the Mall in about 10 years. Its inaugural exhibit *jPresenti! A Latino History of the United*

*States*, displays artifacts, stories, and memorabilia that highlight the historical and cultural legacy of U.S. Latinas and Latinos to inform and shape U.S. history and culture, including a makeshift raft that carried fleeing Cubans to the shores of Florida and new beginnings.

--(3) *Entertainment Nation* draws from the Museum's collection of theater, music, sports, movie and television objects and includes opportunities for interaction regarding our shared experiences. The exhibit also prompts us to engage in critical conversations about social divides and justice, who we are as a nation, who we want to be, and how we can get there.

--The **National Museum of the American Indian** offers its *Americans* exhibit, which highlights the role American Indians have played in the creation of what would become U.S. identity long before there was a United States of America. "Pervasive, powerful, at times demeaning, the images, names and stories in the exhibit reveal how Indians have been embedded in unexpected ways in the history, pop culture, and identity of the U.S." and give visitors a chance to begin a conversation about what we know and don't know about American Indians.

--The **National Museum of Natural History** has a number of exhibits Fellows might want to consider. *David H. Koch Hall of Human Origins*, allows visitors to discover what it means to be human, a journey lasting six million years filled with extinction and survival and the *David H. Koch Hall of Fossils: Deep Time*, allows visitors to meet some 700 fossils while teaching that human actions are driving Earth's rapidly changing climate and emphasizes that choices we make today will live far beyond us with deep ramifications. The *Sant Ocean Hall* provides a history of oceans from the time of origin to the challenges and opportunities of today. *Cellphones: Unseen Connections* examines the ways in which cellphones connect us to the natural world as well as to an unseen global network of people, labor and infrastructure.

--The **National Museum of African American History and Culture** presents *Reckoning: Protest, Defiance and Resilience*, which highlights ways in which visual art has documented protest, commentary, escape, and perspective to tell the African American story alongside the U.S.'s story. *The Power of Place* offers a diverse landscape where visitors explore stories of place from the African American experience, where movement, migration, and displacement help to shape and reshape culture, traditions, histories, and identities.

--The **National Air and Space Museum** has two exhibit areas, one on the Mall and a second housing larger aircraft at the **Steven F. Udvar-Hazy** facility in Chantilly, Virginia. The Smithsonian's two aviation and space museums maintain the world's largest and most significant collection of aviation and space artifacts.

(1) Newly renovated, the Air and Space Museum on the Mall, offers visitors breathtaking exhibits such as the Wright Brother's Wright Flyer, the Spirit of St. Louis, Neil Armstrong's Apollo 11 spacesuit alongside the command module Columbia, Evel Knievel's Harley-Davidson, and a Star Wars X-wing. You can even touch a moon rock in the Boeing Milestones of Flight Hall or view a special exhibit Walking on Other Worlds, and so much more.

(2) On display at the Udvar-Hazy Center, visitors can view a Lockheed SR -71 Blackbird; the Space Shuttle Discovery; the "Enola Gay," the first aircraft to drop an atomic bomb in warfare: over Hiroshima, Japan, in 1945; a Concorde, Fox Alpha, Air France; a Boeing 367-80 Transport, a Grumman F-14D Tomcat; and a host of other famed aviation craft.

--The **National Portrait Gallery**, devoted to telling America's story, houses a number of impressive permanent exhibits, including *American Presidents*, *Identity*, *The Struggle for Social Justice*, *Bravo* (portraits that highlight the performing arts), and *Champions* (portraits of dynamic sports figures), among others.

The Smithsonian Faculty Fellowships are the product of a unique collaboration between MC and the Smithsonian Center for Learning and Digital Access (The Learning Lab). The Fellowship is the signature program of the Paul Peck Humanities Institute at MC. The Program is interdisciplinary and open to faculty from all three campuses. Both full-time and part-time faculty can apply. Fellows are awarded three ESH per semester, a total of six ESH for their work and participation. This Program continues to create new pathways for teaching and integrative learning at Montgomery College.

This year's theme is rich in thought-provoking prospects for teaching, learning, and academic and personal growth. Applicants are encouraged to look at some of the exhibits we have listed, explore or visit others, and imagine how both you and your students can benefit from a new approach to teaching.

For additional information, the application process, and how you as an MC professor can take advantage of this professional development opportunity, please visit the Paul Peck Humanities Institute website, Smithsonian Faculty Fellowships:

<https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/special-programs/paul-peck-humanities-institute/smithsonian-faculty-fellowships.html>

Other questions? Please contact program coordinator, Professor Mimi Mann: [Mimi.Mann@montgomerycollege.edu](mailto:Mimi.Mann@montgomerycollege.edu) or co-coordinator, Dr. Denise Dewhurst: [denisedewhurst@montgomerycollege.edu](mailto:denisedewhurst@montgomerycollege.edu). We would love to help you brainstorm ideas!