

The best bookshops in Seattle

blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2014/07/12/academics-must-visit-these-bookshops-in-seattle/

2014-7-12

Evan Easton-Calabria is a research assistant at the Oxford Department of International Development. In this piece she takes us through the best bookshops in the U.S. city of **Seattle**. If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit when they're undertaking research or visiting a city for a conference, find more information about contributing below.

Although almost no type of independent business can match the number of unique coffee shops in Seattle, the city's bookstores continue to try. Despite the chain bookstore corporations, Seattle has retained at least one independent bookshop in each of its neighbourhoods which both epitomise and augment the character of these areas.



Seattle Skyline. Credit: Don Sullivan [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/)

Any visiting academic or student finding themselves near the University of Washington will be only a few streets away from the [University Bookstore](#), located on the main street known as 'the Ave'. The bookstore, housed in a bright, three-story building, has a wonderful history: opening in 1900 as a student enterprise next to a cloakroom on campus, University Bookstore is now one of the largest independent bookshops in Seattle and one of only a few college bookstores with students directly engaging with the board of directors. The store's new and used book selection, with almost an entire bottom floor of textbooks and academic materials, as well as substantial historical, foreign language, and LGBTQ sections, is similarly inclusive. Hand-written staff recommendations regale bookshelves and cheerful, knowledgeable staff are at every turn. Having expanded over the years to include a tech centre and cafe as well as new book genres and merchandise, it is only the floor plan and not the quality of University Bookstore that has changed.



Maureen F. McHugh at the University Book Store. Credit: [Luke McGough](#) CC BY-ND 2.0

[Mercer Street Books](#) is tucked away in Lower Queen Anne, a slightly upscale area between the Pacific Science Center and the Puget Sound. One of Seattle's most charming neighbourhoods, it now holds the Seattle International Film Festival Theater and a plethora of eclectic boutiques, cafés, and shops. Luckily for us, Mercer Street Books is one of them. With a selection hand-curated by the owner, this new and used bookstore offers a beautiful range of novels from the classic to the obscure, as well as poetry and art books. For the more practical book seekers, there are also great travel guides and cookbooks. Debbie, the owner, is lovely to chat with and seems to encourage the perusal of books just as much as the buying of them. If you're not searching out a particular book, the sales cart outside or the perpetually sleeping cat (often visible from the windows) will at least make you pause. This is how I was drawn in to Mercer Street Books one afternoon a few years ago. Many amazing used books later, I am still very glad I was.



Mercer Street Books. Credit: Stephanie Perry at [Readers Lane](#).

[The Elliott Bay Book Company](#), known to Seattleites as Elliott Bay, has an enormous selection of mainly new books, and is the city's most famous independent bookstore. Open since 1973, it later became the site of Seattle's first bookstore cafe, the Elliott Bay Cafe. My friends and I – and presumably most of the city – had often wandered its aisles and been held spellbound there by readings, and were thus all slightly heartbroken when it moved from its longstanding downtown location in Pioneer Square to Capitol Hill in 2010. Although the atmosphere will never be quite as dusty or magical as the original, the new location is spacious and welcoming, as is the cafe inside. In addition to hosting regular readings and literary events, the bookstore emphasises community through an impressive selection of local writing, from zines to journals to poetry. Indeed, the new Elliott Bay adds to Capitol Hill's flair while retaining its own. After many afternoons there last summer, sitting in the cafe with iced latte and freshly discovered book in hand, I realised that my struggle with Elliott Bay has never been finding something there to read but instead deciding which of the 150,000 books to take home.



Elliott bay: Seattle's legendary independent bookstore. Credit: [Nicola](#) CC BY 2.0

Evan Easton-Calabria studied for a Master's degree in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies from the University of Oxford. She is a writer and consultant focusing on refugee livelihoods and international development.

Do you have a favourite bookshop? If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit when they're undertaking research or visiting a city for a conference, then now's your chance to tell us all about it.

As part of a new weekly feature on LSE Review of Books, we're asking academics and students to recommend their favourite two or three bookshops in a particular city, with the aim of building an exciting online series for our book-loving community of readers the world over.

Bookshops could be academic, alternative, foreign language, hobby-based, secret or underground institutions, second hand outlets, or connected to a university. We'd like to cover all world regions too.

If something comes to mind, we're looking for around 100 words per bookshop, detailing why this place is a must-see. Our editorial team can then find suitable photos and links to accompany the piece, though you're welcome to supply these too. We only ask that you focus on just one city or region, and two or three bookshops within it.

Email us now if you'd like to contribute: lseviewofbooks@lse.ac.uk

- Copyright 2013 LSE Review of Books