

Jade Green
Alejandra Dean, Co-op Supervisor
Dates of Co-op: 01/06/2020-06/30/2020

For my first co-op, I worked as a Digital Intern at the Massachusetts State Archives. I did not initially apply for the digital position; I was recommended to apply to the digital position after the position I originally wanted had been filled. I had not envisioned applying for a position that had “digital” in the job title because I was not technologically inclined. Ultimately, I decided to apply for the Digital Intern position because I wanted experience working at the archives and knew the digital experience would benefit me in the future. The job description gave a broad representation of what my position would entail. Looking back now, I understand the job description didn’t have an explicit description of everyday tasks because new projects often came along and took precedence over typical day to day goings. As the Massachusetts State Archives was a government institution, open to the public, the ebb and flow of tasks during each co-op cycle depended on the kinds of archival documents we received from institutions, as some documents/projects required more attention to detail or had a more urgent timeline. Despite the vague job description, my interview with Alejandra detailed the various tasks I could come across.

During the interview, Alejandra explained to me that my position would mean that I would come across an array of tasks in the digitization process. She mentioned creating subtitles for oral histories of the Massachusetts State Senate to make the recordings accessible to a broader audience, as an example. Alejandra also highlighted that my first task would involve entering metadata for letters from the Eastern Lands collection that dated from the late 18th century to the mid 19th century. After learning that I would have the opportunity to be hands-on with archival documents rather than sitting at a desk, I became even more enthused with the digital position at the Archives. As a matter of fact, the interview solidified not only my interest in the digital position but also the chance to work with Alejandra as my supervisor. Alejandra offered to teach me how to code and encouraged my endeavors in research while onsite, which I had mentioned as interests of mine during our conversation. She was also relatively young and spoke about her experiences in grad courses, and was more than willing to talk to me honestly. I felt very comfortable with Alejandra from the beginning and eager to work with her at the archives.

When it comes to being offered the job position, I would say with absolute certainty that co-op class and the resume process led to my co-op acceptance earlier than most of my friends. My interview with Alejandra’s supervisor, Michael, also went over well, even though he spoke more than me. Michael focused the majority of the interview on my resume. Our conversation seemed to be a test in how well I held up in comparison to my resume, and how well I responded to questions. For example, we discussed my time in orchestra from high school and our shared love for music, and how he saw my two study-abroad trips as making me an adventurous person. Michael was interested in my research under Professor Parsons and saw my passion for research come through in the interview. And on top of all that, he had traveled for work to Indianapolis, my hometown, and he was interested in the difference between the two cities and how I adjusted to living in Boston. It was quite a relief to have all of those talking points spring from my resume

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without having to work hard to make myself an appealing candidate. The advice with writing down questions during and prior to the interview helped tremendously and demonstrated my interests in the positions and my listening skills.

Prior to COVID-19, I spent the majority of my time on co-op working on the Eastern Lands collection. The Eastern Lands project was both the most challenging and interesting task I faced at the archives, as I had no prior experience with archival practices, and I worked on Eastern Lands alone, with the exception of Alejandra's periodic guidance and advice. Essentially, I spent my time downstairs in the Reading Room, trying to decipher and carefully handle letters well over 150 years that hadn't been processed by an archivist since the 1980s. I was responsible for processing the letters in accordance with Alejandra's standards to new boxes and individual folders while adding clear and specific details about the letters to the metadata. In all honesty, I found the Eastern Lands project interesting and challenging because the tasks I completed were not something I had done before, and also because I had very minimal prior knowledge on the geography of Maine and Massachusetts, as the Eastern Lands was the archives' collection on the division of Massachusetts and Maine. I also had no experience with reading handwriting from that time period. I went from not knowing anything to becoming an expert on the Eastern Lands collection, just as Alejandra predicted in the beginning. I suddenly could read the handwritten letters between five and ten minutes, when in the beginning, it took me well over fifteen minutes with Alejandra's help. Over time, I proved that I could be trusted to make smart, effective decisions without Alejandra. I used research techniques from my history classes to help me identify authors of letters and whether the letter originated from Massachusetts or Maine for the metadata; I owe a great deal of my success from my history courses and research-based projects because that background made me an independent worker. My co-op experience also taught me that I thrive in work environments where I can work independently with a supervisor who both supports and encourages me as an independent work. For my next work experience, I am interested in another research-based position that keeps me away from my desk most of the time.

Michael mentioned the archives the majority of the archival materials are not from the perspective of the minority views, such as the interactions between the state and the Native Americans; therefore, those interactions give an inaccurate, incomplete, or wrong perspective in terms of state documented history. Archivists themselves had the leeway to decide what was important history to document and how the documentation, so that meant even the minority perspective at the archival level, has been excluded at the archival level due to lack of diversity in representation of archivists throughout history. I learned firsthand how parts of history could be silenced or ignored. Not even the institutions that hold historical documents have the whole, true story.