

Name: Christopher Alam
Major: English & Prof. Writing
Graduation Year: 2021
Year(s) in lab: 3

1. What project(s) were you involved in?

I was primarily involved in the NYT Media Project, where I researched articles for several different terms. Mainly, I focused on “Kurds*” and different gendered terms like “Iranian* AND women*” and “Lebanese* AND men*”

2. When did you join the lab?

I joined Dr. Joseph’s lab in May 2019, at the end of my sophomore year.

3. How did you hear about the lab?

I took Arabic class for several semesters in Ustaatha Shayma’s class, and she would often encourage us students to join. Many of my classmates were interns already and would promote the lab often. As it turns out, almost all of the interns I worked with came from these Arabic classes also.

4. What was the greatest learning experience you obtained from the lab?

The plethora of lessons there are to be learned in the lab cannot be understated. From Dr. Joseph’s help, to meeting with fellow interns, to doing the work itself, there are significant sources of knowledge and growth to critically engage with. If I had to select only one, my greatest learning experience from the lab would be our weekly meetings, where all of us interns would present the week’s research to Dr. Joseph, and then as a group discuss our thoughts and findings. From these meetings, I now look at the written word in a fundamentally different way. Also, our conversations often turned to broader and more pressing topics, such as our professional lives, outlook, and practical wisdom. Dr. Joseph has a wonderful ability to spontaneously offer a life lesson that will alter your entire perspective for the better.

5. In what ways has the lab challenged you?

The nature of the day to day duties in the lab challenged me to work consistently and diligently. In having to write well researched weekly reports, my ability to work thoroughly in a short time span has improved drastically. As an English major, I actually saw the improvement in my essay writing outside of the lab as well, and my grades in fact improved.

Writing reports was a guaranteed challenge every week, but within this challenge we as interns began to look forward to the strange or interesting articles we might find.

As we gained more research tools and strategies, the constant intake of articles and close readings became a wonderful dive in a specific historical context that unfolded week by week. There was the added challenge of tracking the overarching trends and patterns that spanned decades, and not only that, but writing the reports in such a way that the arc and flow of these patterns was elaborated on in a visible way.

6. Why is the lab a unique experience for undergraduate students?

I cannot think of another undergraduate situation in which you will be working this closely with a distinguished research professor, on this type of topic, with this kind of close-knit team. We as a group discussed very important social and political topics, both historical and current, that other research labs may be hesitant to touch on. But the truth is that the work in the Dr. Joseph lab is unprecedented and incredibly important when it comes to ethnic studies, american media studies, gender studies, orientalism, and beyond. Analyzing how different ethnicities, genders, nationalities, and entities are depicted in a so-called “leading liberal paper” is crucial in understanding how our nation views us, and how we are expected to view others. The things I learned in this lab influenced my understanding of academia, the media, and the world, quite literally.

7. What are some highlights from your time in the lab?

Before Covid, Dr. Joseph held an annual dinner party at her house and invited all of us interns to share food and hang out. It usually happened in the fall I believe, so by then all the interns were good friends and went out to eat together often. Sharing friendship and community in the home of Dr Joseph, who brought us all together through the lab, was an awesome experience. It is a wonderful feeling to cultivate close friendships with people who you are learning about so much of the world.

8. If you could describe the lab in one word, what would it be and why?

I would use the word “enlightening,” because this is really how it felt to come into the lab every week. Over the course of your individual and group analyses, and writing the weekly reports, you will come to develop an understanding of language that carries over into almost every other aspect of your education and media engagement. You start to learn the underlying and overt meanings of words taken for granted, and you will begin altering your own usage to better represent the world around you.

9. How has the lab prepared you for your future endeavors?

I am trying to become a writer, and have explored journalism and editing careers. I read the news now, with more breadth and more scrutiny, and I am able to identify trends in how certain groups or people are being depicted. The lab helped me to engage with almost every aspect of working in the world of literature and journalism today.

Writing under short deadlines, critical thinking and reading, healthy skepticism, team cooperation, quality mentorship, and curiosity are all skills and traits that will be imparted on you from the lab that I found vital to my professional growth.

10. What is some advice you would give incoming interns?

Have a curious mind at all times, and never undermine yourself. It is very easy to feel discouraged or unprepared, but remember that the team and Dr. Joseph will always support you, both in the lab and beyond it. As students, curiosity is what makes work fun. If we are invested in the endless things we have the possibility of exploring, then work starts to feel less like work and more like cultivating our personal garden.

11. Why would you recommend people apply to the lab?

For all the reasons listed above, and that I can say with confidence that joining the Dr. Joseph lab was one of the defining decisions of my undergraduate studies. It simply unlocks the door to learning so much about the world we inhabit, locally and globally. Dr. Joseph's mentorship was crucial to my worldview and self understanding, and the lessons I learned from her will truly continue to shape me and my fellow interns. If you are interested in journalism, sociology, history, social justice, activism, international relations and politics, linguistics, writing, women's/ gender studies, the SWANA region (South West Asia and North Africa), representation, and developing your personal pedagogy under the guidance of a wonderful team and professor, then do strongly consider joining the Lab.