

## July 16, 2020 Muse-ings

### *Intro:*

In an effort to help readers navigate and build their careers during this challenging time, once a month MuseWeekly now includes a brief commentary about job searching and/or labor in the field. The first of these pieces was written by Susannah Philbrick, who graduated from the University of Delaware's Museum Studies Program in May 2020 and was the managing editor of MuseWeekly for the 2019-20 academic year. If you think others might benefit from hearing about your experiences on the job market or in the workplace, please send a short email describing your commentary to [museumstudies@udel.edu](mailto:museumstudies@udel.edu). Commentaries cannot be longer than 600 words. MuseWeekly reaches more than 6,800 subscribers around the world, sharing career development opportunities and advocating for greater diversity, equity, and justice in GLAM and Public Humanities hiring and labor practices.

### *Piece by Susannah Philbrick:*

Looking for work during a pandemic is definitely not how I imagined the end of my graduate school career. I, like so many others, had to tackle the job search during a time when layoffs were rising, museums were closing, and jobs were being canceled after I'd applied for them. It can feel hopeless. But there are jobs out there and we're well-qualified for them—it just might mean shifting focus and searching beyond the GLAM sector. Skills that are seemingly museum-specific, such as crafting exhibition label text, are applicable in all sorts of ways since it's essential to be able to concisely make a point, be it on a gallery wall or in a PowerPoint for your organization's leadership.

When I first jumped into my job search in early spring, I focused on positions in museums and cultural institutions. I only applied to jobs where my qualifications in areas such as historical research, collections management, and public engagement closely matched those of the position. Then the pandemic hit. I was running MuseWeekly at the time, and I saw the museum jobs drying up. As graduation approached, I reached out to my friends who work in national security, finance, and tech for suggestions and recommendations. Their feedback on the skills and range of backgrounds represented in their offices encouraged me to apply to positions that had seemed to only vaguely match my experience and qualifications. While I didn't have many of the specific requirements in these job listings, I knew my education and experience prepared me to be a critical thinker who can research, learn, and write—and therefore excel at many types of jobs. In fact, the job I took—a project analyst for a government contractor—asked for a degree in Business or a related field (neither of which I have). A month into my job I can confidently say that the organizational skills I developed doing historical research and museum collection management have allowed me to deftly take on my new job's responsibilities, and my experience working with the public in museums helps me every day as I provide administrative assistance to individuals both inside and outside my organization.

Everyone's job search is different. But if my journey can say anything more broadly, it's that we, museum studies graduates, have the skills to find employment and succeed inside and outside the museum field, even—and perhaps especially—during uncertain times. For better or worse, we are used to being creative, flexible, and productive with minimal resources. Try to sit down and list your many skills, then embrace their broader applicability and resist the tendency to only apply to positions where they match 99% of the requirements. Does it say “business major” under requirements? Apply anyway—just be prepared to foreground your relevant experience. Don't be afraid to look outside the GLAM sector. Working outside museums and cultural institutions doesn't preclude you (or me) from finding a job within the sector in the future. Museums and the museum field are changing rapidly. Its very boundaries will change, and we can still be a part of that change, regardless of where our paths take us in this moment. Good luck to everyone in their job searches. Stay hopeful and stay safe!