



# Watching and learning from archives

BY RAJANI VISVANATHA

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## **MY EXPERIENCE AT THE ROBARTS CENTRE FOR CANADIAN STUDIES**

I worked for the Robarts Centre of Canadian Studies under the guidance of Professor Jean Michel Montsion in the summer of 2022. It was one of the most rewarding experiences of my university career thus far. The archives and primary sources such as emails, books, and meeting agendas from the past 40 years were left at my disposal. Perusing these archives was the highlight of my experience. It is not often that I get to work with primary sources of information, and I enjoyed developing my ability to create my own connections among works in addition to strengthening my critical thinking skills.

## **WHAT I LEARNED FROM THIS EXPERIENCE**

This experience not only allowed me to develop several transferable skills, but also enabled me to learn a lot about Indigenous scholarship through the writing of a paper that discussed the manner in which the Robarts Centre has addressed the subject. It was particularly interesting to learn about Indigenous languages and their complexities, as I am a French major with an interest in linguistics (Oxford, 2019). Moreover, my degree includes a minor in biology with a focus on conservation. Therefore, listening to the recorded lectures with a focus on both Indigenous matters and the environment was remarkably informative and eye-opening. I had the opportunity to listen to Deborah McGregor's lecture from 2016 on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. When I listened to her lecture, what stood out to me was how she tied environmental dilemmas to social inequity (McGregor, 2016). I was also fortunate to listen to Bonita Lawrence's lecture from 2017 on the negative environmental consequences that flowed from the economic choices made by the Canadian government on Indigenous land (Lawrence, 2017). She discussed both the methylmercury poisoning that took place at Muskrat Falls and the destruction that ensued at Meadow Lake after nuclear waste was left there, both of which are tragedies of particular interest to the field of conservation biology. In brief, my time at Robarts opened my eyes to the ways in which Canadian Studies is intrinsically connected to so many fields of study, including my own.

## **HOW THIS EXPERIENCE COINCIDES WITH MY PROFESSIONAL GOALS**

My experience at the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies resonates with my current professional goals in a multitude of ways. I strive to be an educator and, as such, it is important for me to be able to understand Indigenous scholarship so that my students have a better understanding of our settler-colonial past. I would also love to incorporate what I learned about the environment from the lectures by McGregor and Lawrence into my future curriculum because I feel that Indigenous perspectives on issues of environmental justice are not mentioned enough, if at all, in the Ontario biology curriculum.

## CONCLUSION

I am deeply grateful to Professor Montsion, and to the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies, for the opportunity I was given to conduct research using their archives. I value the transferable skills and knowledge that I learned, and I believe that they will shape not only my academic career but also my career as an educator for years to come. ■

## REFERENCES

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