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Graduate Highlight: UL Lafayette Made a Difference in My Life

UL Grad School -- 08/24/2016

Meet Daniel Manuel, who attended the UL Lafayette Graduate School and earned his M.A. in History with an American History focus in 2014. He is now pursuing his Ph.D. in History at Rutgers University.

Initially, Daniel was unsure of whether he wanted to pursue a graduate degree in history, so he opted to earn his master's at UL Lafayette, which is also where he earned his undergraduate degree, because he was familiar with the high-quality faculty and Louisiana history resources. His original plan for his master's thesis was to study the Equal Rights Amendment within Louisiana, but after attending a conference in New Orleans he decided to focus on Lafayette's gay and lesbian community from the 1960s through the 1980s.



"I used my master's degree as an excuse to look deeper into those stories and how they unfolded in Lafayette," he says. "I did about 20 interviews with people from Lafayette who had been in the gay community, dug through newspapers, forays into the archives at UL Lafayette, those kinds of things."

Daniel was excited to "unearth local history," and he knew he had the resources and support to tell that history at this Louisiana grad school.

"The faculty were extremely supportive of my work, which is really validating when you're working on a somewhat taboo topic," he says. "Once word got around that I was working on this project, the institution reached out to help me."

Now in the Ph.D. program at Rutgers, he is studying the history of HIV/AIDS in Louisiana.

"The history of Lafayette that I wrote became one of white gay men because of the sources and contacts I relied on," Daniel says. "Studying HIV/AIDS is a way to work with a broader section of the population but still get to the issues of sexuality and politics that interest me. Louisiana's LGBT history is hardly just one of white gay men. That's why I branched out topically and geographically to deal with a broader swath of people."

Though he's in school in New Jersey, Daniel still travels back to the Louisiana grad school to interview people and utilize the Dupre Library archives. This year, he'll start working on his dissertation more intensely and he plans to move back to Lafayette to take advantage of the "invaluable" resources and contacts he has here.

Daniel credits the rigor and intimate size of his master's program for his confidence in his research and coursework at Rutgers.

"I got word that I got in at Rutgers, and they sent out a list of people in my cohort who were coming from places like Oxford, NYU, and a lot of these schools with really prestigious reputations," Daniel recalls. "So I wanted to know: Will I cut it? What I found was that my graduate coursework at UL Lafayette prepared me perfectly. The workload was pretty similar and I knew what to do with my doctoral courses."

"I had already read a lot of the stuff that was considered foundational. I came into these classes and I could talk about these topics when I had read them already and other people were struggling," he says.

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my classes at UL Lafayette were 3 to 4 people, so the professors could actually guide me through the material."

One of the most valuable experiences of his graduate career, he says, was to help curate an exhibit for the [Museum on the Move](#), which is a refurbished Airstream travel trailer that showcases public history students' research of a particular Louisiana-based topic.

"Over a year, we did the research and curated the mobile exhibit on women in Louisiana," Daniel says. "It's an outstanding opportunity that I wouldn't have had anywhere else. It has a place of pride on my CV. I can't even say it has come into play in my doctoral work, but it's something I'm really proud of and will help me on the job market."

Daniel also adopted a new mantra during his time in the UL Lafayette Graduate School that he says got him through tough times: "It will all get done."

"It's expressed in the interactions and teachings with faculty," Daniel explains. "If you fail to accomplish something or you don't do it perfectly, your life isn't going to come apart. This is graduate school work—just hold on to it and try your best. This got me through my first year at Rutgers when I wasn't sure of myself or my abilities. The mantra was what I could hold on to."

After he finishes his doctoral program, Daniel plans on pursuing a career in teaching and research in a history department—ideally, one in Louisiana where he can help students have the same experience he had and where he can continue to study politics and sexuality issues.

"I'm open to other topics, but part of my desire to move back to Louisiana is because I just think there is endlessly surprising history yet to be uncovered or yet to be explored," he says.



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