

Providence Weatherwax and Eva Utzschneider are Research Assistants with the Expert Analysis Group (EAG). Eva earned her BA in Economics from University of Maryland in 2022 and joined the Division shortly after. Providence joined EAG after earning her BS in Economics from Michigan State University in 2022.

Q: What about your college experience led you to this job?

Eva: In undergrad my focus was split between computer science, economics, and the Federal Fellows program (my school's unofficial pipeline to government jobs). I figured if I could find a place that combined all three interests, I would consider it my dream straight-out-of-college job. By some stroke of serendipity, I signed up for an 'Economics of Antitrust' course my senior fall and loved it. When the professor circulated the RA position listing, I knew this was the role I had been looking for; we code for economists at the DOJ, after all!

Providence: In college, it took me a while to select my course of study. Ultimately, I chose to major in economics and minor in data analytics and sustainable agricultural and food systems. There were so many diverse courses that piqued my interest, and I didn't like having to limit myself to just a few fields of study. When considering my first job out of college, I knew I wanted to work in a place where I could be exposed to a wide range of fields, and EAG's RA position provided that opportunity. I could use my research and coding experience in a job where I could learn about a multitude of industries. The position seemed like the best way to combine all my interests and skills.

Q: How was your interview experience and what led you to ultimately choose EAG?

Providence: My interview experience was the best I ever had. I spoke to multiple economists and RAs who were all very passionate about their work. Everyone I spoke to made me feel that EAG cared about having a positive workplace culture that consisted of dedicated, hardworking, and kind people. This led me to choose EAG because I knew I could develop as a professional in such a supportive environment.

Q: How does your work compare to what you expected when you interviewed?

Eva: It's hard to remember exactly what I expected. As a college student with limited real-world experience, I don't think I fully understood what "there is a lot of data work and some exposure to case theory" really meant at the time of my interview, even though I now know the RAs were describing it accurately. I can say for sure that I didn't anticipate how much time it takes to get acclimated with datasets like the ones we receive at the Division. In school, most data projects were either pre-cleaned or relatively small, so loading in a dataset took an insignificant amount of time. At work I've found that it can take days of exploring a dataset before I really get a good picture on how it is organized, what fields are important, what missing values are expected, and what may need to be cleared up by the parties.

Q: You both have now worked on cases that have gone or are going to trial. What were your most and least favorite parts about seeing a case to trial?

Providence: My work on my first merger litigation was exciting, challenging, and fast paced. It was one of the first cases I worked on at the Division and it was a great learning experience. The speed at which projects had to be completed was both my most and least favorite aspect of the case. The tight deadlines sometimes made the work stressful, but these same deadlines also allowed me to rapidly improve my coding skills. I had to learn new skills quickly while also ensuring my work was accurate.

Q: What experiences from your studies do you think best prepared you for this position?

Eva: My internship and research experience best prepared me for working in teams and project management. That said, in terms of completing the day-to-day work, econometrics and intro to data science have helped me the most; we spend most of our time working with large datasets, so feeling comfortable in a coding environment is essential.

Q: What do you think has made you successful in this role?

Providence: I think regularly communicating with my assigned economists has been essential to me producing quality work. Some projects I have been assigned required me to work with complex data that is not always intuitive to work with. Frequently asking my economists questions has made me a more effective coder.

Q: What are your plans for the next chapter of your career?

Eva: I'm not sure! In some ways, I think this role is perfect for people who are still figuring it out. With the proximity to PhDs, attorneys, and now data scientists, I don't feel pigeonholed in the slightest, which was one of my biggest worries coming out of school. On top of the empirical skills that I've learned here, I think the exposure to these careers in the 'real world' is helping guide my decisions about next steps.