

# Coral Sheldon-Hess

coral@sheldon-hess.org | coral.sheldon-hess.org | 412-819-6483

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Dear Search Committee:

I am excited to submit this application for the position of Library Web Services Developer and Head of Digital Initiatives at the Bowdoin College Library. My technical and analytical skills, leadership training and experience, and passion for building and managing user-friendly library web services would be an asset in this position. It would also allow me to return to a field I love: library technology.

I did very similar work in my role as Web Services Librarian at the University of Alaska Anchorage/ Alaska Pacific University's Consortium Library. During my five years in that position, I served as the primary designer, developer, and administrator of the library's web presence, writing HTML, CSS, JavaScript, PHP, and MySQL on a Linux Apache web server, often using a command line interface for my work. I administered and used several open source, locally-hosted systems (e.g. MODX, WordPress multi-site) and several vendor-hosted systems (e.g. Springshare's suite); for each of these, I was also the primary contact for training and technical support for library staff. I used my tuition benefits to take a course in Photoshop, which I used to create and modify images and icons for our web presence, and I tracked web usage statistics and patterns with Google Analytics. I also gathered requirements, researched options, set up trials, and worked closely with stakeholders and library users in order to update, replace, and/or implement new library systems (e.g. replacing LibStats with LibAnswers, adding LibCal to automate room booking). In the first couple of years in that role, and later when the Electronic Resources Librarian was unavailable, I performed troubleshooting for EZProxy and e-resource access issues and, when needed, worked with vendors to reach resolution. I also led our Web Team; proposed, created, and led our Social Media Team; ran the local chapter of the Alaska Library Association and a number of other professional groups; and served as Head of the Library Systems Department in my manager's absence. To be successful in these roles I had to be able to plan and prioritize my work, to manage multiple competing deadlines, to work both alone and collaboratively, and to negotiate with other leaders to ensure user-friendly and technically feasible decisions were being made.

In addition to loving technology, I also love to teach and to build learning communities. I have taught courses touching on several programming languages, web organization and design standards, web accessibility, technical project management, version control (GitHub), command line interfaces, APIs, and visual design principles. Although classroom management is very different from management of a team, several of the skills are transferrable: communicating clearly; providing mentoring and motivation as needed; giving feedback in a timely, constructive, and productive manner; collaboratively setting goals with stakeholders; providing direction without stifling creativity; and managing the flow of meetings so that no voices go unheard. I wanted my classroom, and I want my work teams, to be a safe place for *everyone* to make mistakes, learn, and grow, no matter their background or previous experience; I also try to make it as easy as possible for teammates to give me feedback, and I value it as a learning opportunity and chance to improve myself.

I am a librarian (MLIS, Pitt), but I am also an engineer (MS, Carnegie Mellon): I enjoy troubleshooting technical problems and learning new things. Some of that joy is inherent—puzzles are fun—but most of my satisfaction comes from applying those solutions to make people's lives easier. I would very much like the opportunity to do that for the Bowdoin College Library community.

Thank you for taking the time to review my application, and please feel free to contact me if I can provide any context or clarifications to help you make this decision!

Sincerely,

J. Coral Sheldon-Hess

As an informal post-script, I'd like to proactively answer a couple of questions:

I am not looking for a short-term position, and I would absolutely move out of Pennsylvania for this role.

My short tenure at Coiled Computing was due to a major pivot by the company's leadership. I wore a lot of hats at Coiled, which was great. Of course, I knew going in that startups change course rapidly; I was still somewhat surprised when I realized, six months in, that none of the hats I was wearing fit into the company's goals anymore, and if I stayed, I was at risk of burning out. Approximately a month after I left, everyone remaining on two of my teams was laid off, along with half of the third team. As of now, the company is still in existence, but at less than a third of its previous size, and with a greatly diminished set of offerings. I don't regret the experience, despite its brevity, because I learned a lot and made some great professional contacts: I still get together with a whole group of former "Coilies" to play a Zoom-based trivia game most weeks.

If I were to leave my current position at Optum (part of UnitedHealth Group), it would be for a number of reasons: 1) when I tell someone where I work, I feel the need to reassure them that I am not in the parts of the company that harm people; 2) related, but subtly different: I miss being proud of the work I'm doing, knowing that it helps people; and 3) the IT infrastructure is extremely controlled (for entirely understandable reasons) and does not allow developers to experiment or innovate, which is frustrating and also means that my work is by necessity somewhat limited in variety and scope. Something that appeals to me about this position, much like my position at UAA/APU, is that I'd get to wear a lot of hats, talk to a lot of people, and touch a lot of different technologies. And my work would be directly improving users' and colleagues' lives.