

# EXPERIENCE

*stories beyond the classroom*



An aerial photograph of a lush green valley with terraced rice fields. The fields are arranged in a series of horizontal, stepped terraces that follow the contours of the hills. The rice plants are in various stages of growth, showing shades of green and yellow. The surrounding forest is dense and vibrant green. The overall scene is a beautiful example of traditional agricultural terracing in a mountainous region.

# *Experience Journal*

*EXPERIENCE: stories beyond the classroom*, a College of Humanities student journal, publishes essays that capture learning through experience. Through a single story, students show how they integrated their studies with an experiential learning opportunity, most often a study abroad or internship. *EXPERIENCE* is about engaging with the world outside of campus.

*"Terraced Rice Field in Mu Cang Chai, Vietnam"*  
Photo by Jimmy Tran / Shutterstock



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Photo by Alexis Sorensen

## *Publisher's Message*

### **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM?**

In Amor Towles's thoughtful novel *A Gentleman in Moscow*, the sophisticated aristocrat Count Alexander Rostov is placed under lifelong house arrest in the Metropol Hotel in Moscow by a Soviet court. Inside the hotel Rostov interacts with staff and visitors and watches as Bolshevik Russia changes yet remains the same.

One of the count's fellow travelers in the Metropol is a precocious nine-year-old girl named Nina. After spending part of her young life adventuring in one of the great hotels of the early twentieth century, Nina learns that she must now go to school in a classroom with other children. She is convinced that education will be boring. The classically educated count, who loved his formal education, reassures her that it will broaden her horizons and give her a sense of the world's scope. Nina replies, "Wouldn't travel achieve that more effectively?"

Nina has placed her finger on the classic stereotype about learning in the classroom as opposed to learning by experience—that the classroom is boring and ineffective, and that experience is engaging and productive. There may often be some truth in the stereotype, but in the College of Humanities we believe that significant experiential learning can happen in the classroom, especially with project-based learning. It also happens in mentored research, labs, internships, and study abroad programs. This type of learning is defined less by the setting and more by the method.

One of these methods used in the College of Humanities is the Experiential Learning Cycle: Intention, Integration, Reflection. Intention implies a metacognitive element to our learning. We articulate what we are attempting to learn, and we identify transferable skills and competencies that will be gained in particular activities. Integration is the combination of our articulated intentions with the learning experience. Reflection is the process by which we narrate what we have learned and why it is

relevant or important to life beyond the university.

My own research on experiential learning has taught me that experiences come in several types. They can, of course, be mundane, but they can also be memorable, meaningful, and transformative. These significant experiences exist in a continuum, building from memorable

to transformative. A memorable experience has emotion and novelty. Examples might be visiting a new place or eating an interesting dish for the first time. You might want to come back to the restaurant, but you would not attach more significance to it. A meaningful experience has an emotional layer and provides a new perspective about oneself or others, such as attending a lecture or presentation that caused you to think about something in a new way or gave you insights into another culture. A transformative experience has emotion and new insights and perspectives, but it also includes enduring change in identity and behavior. For example, working on a project or research with a faculty mentor caused you to change your career plans.

For an experience to be transformative, we need to grapple with a disorienting problem or dilemma, and, through structured reflection, resolve that dilemma in a way that integrates the new perspective into our identity. The essays that follow in this issue of *Experience: Stories Beyond the Classroom* are examples of the hard but rewarding work of structured reflection, a key component of both experiential and transformative learning.



# Layered Learning



Photo by Isaac Richards

**C**lenching my leather-gloved hands around the wooden shaft, I pried the pickax from the earth. I steadied my grip, then swung it over my head, sinking the iron tip forcefully into the one-thousand-five-hundred-year-old soil. Inches below the point of my pickax, soon to be discovered, was the mosaic floor of an ancient synagogue in Huqoq, Israel. I didn't know it at the time,

but the faces of the biblical prophetess Deborah and the warrior Barak were gazing up at me through the layers of dirt while I dug, just waiting to be uncovered.

Aided by BYU Experiential Learning Funds, I joined the Huqoq Excavation Project in the summer of 2022. When I left for Israel, I had no idea that I would have the honor of helping uncover the earliest and currently only known depiction of the biblical heroines Deborah and Jael in ancient Jewish art. This was a find of a lifetime. But I was not an archaeology major, and the story of how I got there had many layers.

My story began on a study abroad at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. It was January 2020, and my career ambitions were fuzzy. After arriving at the airport in Tel Aviv, one of the first things I noticed was the word *tel*. Tel Gezer. Tell es-Sultan.

The word *tel* is a Hebrew word meaning “rubbish heap” or “mound.” In archaeology, the technical definition is “a mound of occupational layers.” These mounds look like small hills but are not natural features. They were formed over time as biblical cities were destroyed by invaders, then rebuilt over the ruins.

The history of the Middle East is this cycle, repeated over thousands of years: conquer, rebuild, repeat. Slowly, ancient cities would rise on the rubble of their former editions, and the accumulated heap of dirt, pottery, and destroyed buildings leaves behind a little mound of layered history.

My first experience in Israel was likewise layered. The trip was designed for experiential learning, progressing from textbook to classroom to field trip. I saw sites like Hezekiah's Tunnel first on a page, then on a slideshow, and finally in person. The curriculum was a robust survey of the history, archaeology, religion, politics, art, literature, and culture of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.



Photo by Isaac Richards



Photo by Isaac Richards

I don't even have time to mention the spiritual layers of my experience in Israel. Suffice it to say that I felt "the spirit of place" and the weight of history by standing on the stones and looking at the waters that were made holy by the life of the Savior.

In March 2020, the pandemic arrived in Bethlehem. Within days, I was on a plane home. Devastated. The abruptness of the canceled trip felt like a shattered vessel. I ended up missing more than half of the trip—the New Testament half—including trips to Galilee and the scenes of Jesus's birth and ministry. The infuriating unfairness seemed to be more than I could bear.

At home, the urgency of choosing a career returned. Becoming a professor sounded like a good route, but how could I select a single discipline when my experience in Israel had been so rich and interdisciplinary?

It was at this point, admittedly a bit disappointed to be back in a classroom in Provo, that I discovered the world of rhetoric. Suddenly, everything fell into place. For the next two years, classroom learning was my world. I read the canonical texts voraciously: Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates. I developed disciplinary expertise, researched graduate programs, and built my curriculum vitae.

Rhetoric is an example of what researchers Jan Meyer and Ray Land call a “threshold concept.” Once you learn it, you can’t unsee it. It transforms your perspective permanently.

With this abundance of newfound learning under my belt, I was suddenly invited to return to Israel—a chance I never thought I’d have. This time, rather than visiting archaeological sites, I’d be digging one up myself.

Still wounded from my pandemic-shortened study abroad, I doubted that my second experience in Israel could be as meaningful as my first. But I was wrong. This time, equipped with what Associate Professor Brian Jackson calls “rhetoric goggles,” I saw the archaeology in Israel through different eyes.

The excavation added even more layers to what I experienced in Israel two years earlier. I took a directed readings course prior to departure and received hands-on training in archaeological fieldwork and methodology at the site. I was required to record elevations, wash pottery, organize and catalogue artifacts in the lab, keep a field journal, and take notes during regional field trips. I even got to see the places I thought I had missed out on seeing, like Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee.

I also attended biweekly lectures by specialists in architecture, pottery, mosaics, painted plaster, numismatics, stratigraphy, liturgy, and so much more. What we learned in the classroom was immediately put to work in the field. I discovered how new disciplines, contexts, and lenses could add new layers to my learning. This is one of the most important things that the humanities can teach us: how to keep learning, one layer at a time.

Now, I’m back from the dig, and I have just read the most recent issue of *Experience: Stories Beyond the Classroom*. I ponder the many narratives of experiential learning that were impacted by the pandemic, and I begin to write reflectively about my own journey.

As I write, I remember one key moment for me that really solidified the understanding of layered learning that I’ve articulated here.

After returning from the archaeological excavation, I took a creative writing workshop during my first semester of graduate school. In the workshop, I learned about the importance of reflection in essaying. Professor Pat Madden taught us about the double frame of the personal essay: the perspective of the main character in the story and the perspective of the narrator who is writing about



*Photo by Isaac Richards*

that story later, with knowledge that did not exist when the events of the story were unfolding.

While learning about the importance of reflection, I happened upon an essay that I wrote two years ago, right after I came home early from the Jerusalem Center. The anger, pain, and fierce injustice that I wrote about then seemed naïve and trivial to me now. In the two years since that heartbreaking cancellation, I had returned to Israel! I had discovered the discipline of rhetoric! I had seen the places that I thought I would never see again! And, most importantly, I had seen those places through critical and analytical lenses that I developed back in the classroom. That new perspective allowed me to observe things the second time that I never would have noticed during my first trip to Israel.

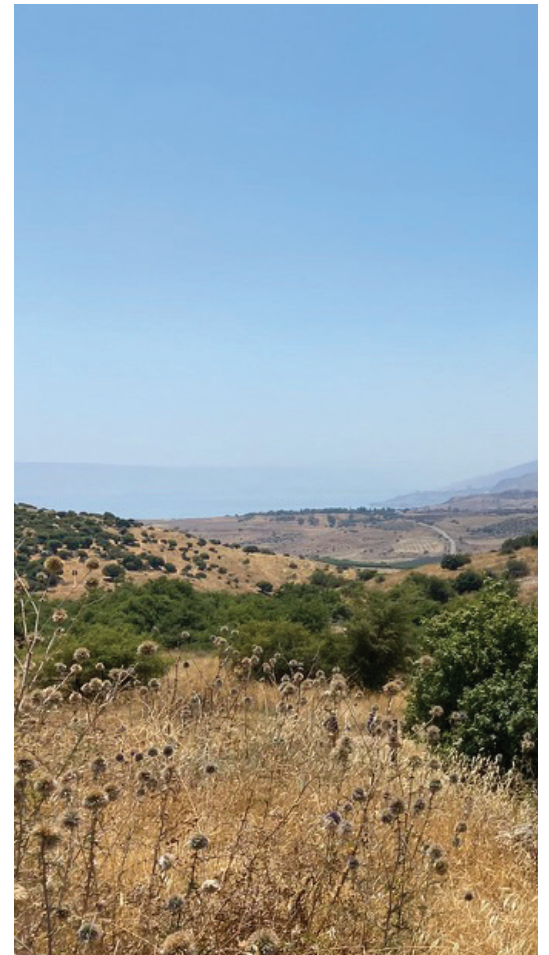
In short, one of the challenges and obstacles to my experiential learning was myself. I wanted it to be all experience and no classroom. I now know that such an approach would have prevented me from realizing



*Photo by Isaac Richards*

the full potential of my experience abroad. Classroom learning and experiential learning go hand in hand. Reflective writing, the type of writing championed by John Bennion and the Experiential Writing Project, is also absolutely essential to helping us realize the lessons and layers of learning we experience.

It occurs to me that our culture perhaps puts too much emphasis on once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Experiential learning isn't a one-way trip; it is iterative and cyclical. It moves dynamically between the classroom and beyond. This fusion, with the passage of time and a little reflective writing, can help our learning become as deep, complex, and meaningful as the layers of history in the Holy Land.





*Photo by Isaac Richards*

*Photo by Isaac Richards*



# London Solo



Photo by Savannah Lunt

“What is this?” I asked, staring with disbelief at the bright, unwrapped package on my lap. With two fingers, I held up a purple string attached to a plastic rectangle, where it dangled innocently.

My mom smiled widely, hardly able to contain her excitement as she exclaimed, “It’s a taser! For your trip!” She came and kissed me on the head. “Happy birthday!”

I made a sound in my throat that couldn’t decide whether to be a laugh or a scoff and came out instead as a strangled noise. “A . . . taser?”

My dad looked at me out of the corner of his eye and winked, trying not to laugh. It wasn’t a secret that my mom tended to be a little overprotective, especially where I was concerned.

I was eighteen years old, and I had never been known for my independence. I was a homebody, very content to sit in an overstuffed chair and read. If I did venture out, I always used my phone like a lifeline, for navigation, calls, and comfort in awkward situations. I was not what you would call adventurous. And I never—I mean never—went out of my way to put myself out there. Anyone who knew me could tell you that.

However, despite these quirks, I decided to attend a study abroad in England. On a whim, while looking at places to go, I was enamored by the idea of London. The program talked about developing creativity in students and curiosity in their surroundings and detailed several hands-off activities that were planned for the trip that made me simultaneously more excited and nervous. Before I knew it I was interviewing and paying for an experience that was wholly outside my comfort zone. I was leaving the next day to live with forty other strangers in a city I had never been in. Without cell service.

As I packed later that night, I googled how I could bring a taser through TSA on the plane to London and

clicked on the first article that popped up. It said that self-defense weapons were one hundred percent outlawed in the country. The article suggested that if you find yourself being mugged in one of largest cities in the world, just roll up your newspaper, plant your feet, and whack your assailant until they stop trying to rob you. I gingerly put the taser in one of my drawers, wrapped in an old sock, and determined I would start reading the newspaper.

The next morning, among the flurry of airport activity, and the nerves in the pit of my stomach, I felt my mom squeeze my arm.

“You have your taser?” she asked anxiously.

“Yes,” I lied.

She looked me in the eyes, a serious expression on her face, and said soberly, “Promise me one thing, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Don’t go out into the city alone.”

I told her I would always stay with someone and then for the next eight hours went through a whirl of airplane security, vacuum-sealed dinner, and an unsuccessful attempt to sleep in the tiny seat. As the sky outside the window began to lighten, I thought about what I was doing. What did I even hope to gain from something like this? I was sure I would be calling home to my mom before the wheels touched the ground.

Never mind. No cell service.

After making my way through the airport and taking an Uber to the city, I finally stood with my suitcase in front of the BYU London Centre and took a deep breath in the chilly January air.

I walked in among a few other students, since flights from different home states arrived staggered throughout the day. I was immediately greeted by the professors, who told me to stash my suitcases on the third floor and then return. I struggled with my heavy luggage up the stairs and jogged back down, trying to hold back a yawn—the six-hour time difference showing under my eyes.

Jamin, one of the professors, handed me a Tube card, some paper money with a drawing of who I thought was Queen Elizabeth, and a map.

The other professor, Mat, glowingly described our first assignment to me.



Photo by Savannah Lunt

“While everybody continues to arrive, you’re going to have some time to go and explore today. We want you to go out into the city and experience some of the London scene. Get curious, get creative! Take the Tube, find some food, and have an experience!”

I gaped, sure he was joking. “You want me to go . . . alone?”

Jamin smiled reassuringly. “We believe in you! Remember that we’ve prepared for this experience and you should have a little bit of an idea of where you’re going to be going and what you’re going to be doing. We want you to take what we’ve talked about in our classes before the study abroad and apply them to the city. We want you to develop independence. And we’re here to help you with whatever you need before

you set out!”

I remembered that we had prepared for an outing like this, I just hadn't remembered that it would be a solo trip. Realizing that the promise I had made to my mom was now a little impractical, I hesitantly walked out the entrance and stood with a puzzled expression as I stared at the map. I turned left, then spun around and turned right, trying to get my bearings among the old Victorian houses that loomed over like guards.

I hesitatingly picked a path and walked nervously into the city; it teemed with a vibrant flux of people of all colors, shapes, and sizes. People spoke in cell phones as they walked down the sidewalk, and as I weaved between shop fronts I heard chatter in all sorts of languages. I clutched my wallet as I ventured down to take the Tube, looking for a newspaper as I took the stairs underground.

After going for one stop—sure that I could remember at least that—I came out to a quieter street, lined with restaurants and homes. I wandered around aimlessly, wondering what I was even supposed to be doing, until I spotted a sign pointing downstairs for antique books. I hurried inside as it started to rain, combining the bitter cold with a frigid dampness.

The smell of old books overwhelmed me. Finally, I thought, something familiar. I reached for my phone to Google how many stars the place had and then realized it wouldn't do me much good. Adjusting to living without my phone constantly by my side was going to be a huge change for me.

I nodded hesitantly to the cashier, who smiled back. It was quiet in the shop, and I ran my hand along the spines as I weaved in and out of shelves. It felt nice to nest in the quietness of the store and be alone with my thoughts. I hadn't realized life had gotten so busy in the months before. I tried to remember the last time I had simply taken a walk outside, without my phone, earbuds, or a friend. I couldn't think of one.

I purchased a worn paperback book from the shop and a hot chocolate from the café next door. I sat down under a brightly colored awning to read and sip my drink. My body filled with warmth, and I recognized how beautiful the streets were in the January evening.

As the streetlights began to wink on, I stood up, pulled out the soggy, crumpled map from my coat pocket and peeled apart the pages gingerly. This navigating thing was definitely going to take some getting used to, but I thought I could at least manage getting home okay.

Just before dark, with a few wrong turns, I made my way back to the underground, bypassing the free

newspaper stand with a laugh. After taking my one stop back to the centre, I found my way back to the Victorian doors and the smiling professors. I stood in the entryway, where all the students were also just arriving back, stamping their boots, warming their hands, and heading into the back kitchen to eat dinner. The chattering of students and the blast of heat and smells of food created a warm sort of chaos that made me smile. Suddenly, I wasn't so worried anymore.

“How did it go?” Jamin asked as I took off my coat.

I smiled, tossing the map in the trash. “I think I'm going to love it here.”

Looking back on this experience several years later, it still remains one of the highlights of my London experience. While I remember being nervous and unsure about activities like this one that put me out of my comfort zone, it began developing a sense

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“Even though I never took a paper and pencil test in the London Centre, I learned more from those three months than I did from taking tests in all the years I've been in school before.”

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of independence in me that has shaped who I've become. The curiosity I learned to cultivate and the creativity we had to show to manage many different situations has helped me in school, in the workplace, and in my personal life. In particular, my education shifted drastically for the first time from memorizing terms off of flashcards to engaging in an experience that helped me learn life skills and how to overcome uncomfortable things, along with deepening my understanding of the classwork in our curriculum. There are assignments, experiences, and skills that I remember and use daily, even now.

I think that often, we view education as a necessary struggle, often complaining about the course load, or feeling overwhelmed by exams and assignments. For me, my study abroad changed my views on the education process. Even though I never took a paper and pencil test in the London Centre, I learned more from those three months than I did from taking tests in all the years I've



*Photo by Savannah Lunt*

been in school before. Learning through experiences like these is not only beneficial, but also fun, rewarding, and long lasting. When I did return to my educational pursuits at BYU, my classes became more gratifying and enriching. And while it wasn't the classes themselves that had changed, my changes and my newfound curiosity and creativity allowed me to transfer what I had learned through my experiences on a study abroad in London, England, to my educational experience in Provo, Utah. As I head toward graduation, I look back and can't imagine what my school experience might have been if not for three months in London and a nervous trip out in the rain on my first day there.





*"Cuith-Raing" by Benjamin Williams  
Kennedy Center Photo Contest Winner  
Light & Truth Study Abroad, The Isle of Skye, Scotland*



*White Cliffs of Dover, United Kingdom  
Photo by Benjamin Williams*

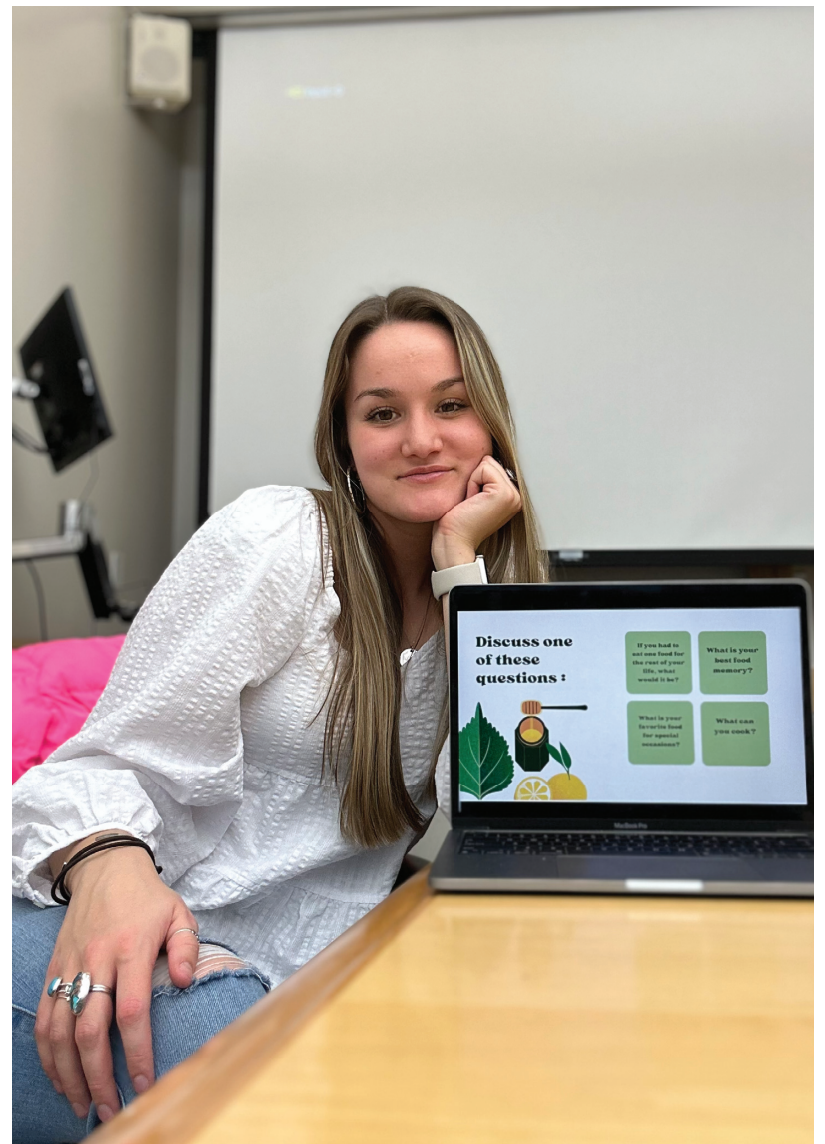
# *I Am Not a Reader... Yet*

**A**fter my eighth grade graduation, I never thought I would be back in junior high. But, unbeknownst to me, my education as an English teaching major and work as a research assistant for Associate Professor Dawan Coombs, along with a BYU-Public School Partnership grant, would bring me back to seventh grade. My work positioned me in a class designed to help students find the motivation to read. To encourage students, we used literature circles, which allow students in the same class to read books based on their interests and reading levels. Many finished a full book in a couple of months—for some, it was the first time they had ever accomplished such a feat!

While I talked to individual students about their literature circle books, I asked them to read a paragraph out loud, which was how I evaluated their fluency levels, while the rest of the class did their silent reading for the day. During one of these reading conferences, I knelt down by a student named Sadie, who was watching the clock, and asked her to read to me. She stuttered through a couple of words, then started to bounce around the paragraph sporadically. I tried some different reading strategies, but the words still tumbled around in a whirlwind of unprocessed sounds. Her eyes welled up with tears, and I quickly took her into the hallway before she began to cry.

“I’m never going to understand this. I’m not a reader,” Sadie said.

I choked on my words, looking for something, anything, to say. Even with my limited experience as a new teacher, I knew those were probably the worst words to hear. Initially, I was confident that I knew what I was getting myself into. I was a good teacher



and a straight A student. I had even worked as a substitute teacher for the prior school year, yet here I was feeling like a fish out of water. Sadie could sound out the words, but at thirteen years old she could not comprehend what she read.

Struggling readers frequently fly beneath the radar in elementary school and then feel too embarrassed to ask for help by the time they get to middle or high school. They do not define themselves as readers, but rather they see themselves in one-dimensional ways, saying, “I am an athlete” or “I am a math person.” However, humans are complex beings. We have the ability to be good at multiple things, a concept central to the design of the reading class I helped in. Part of my responsibility in this role was supporting students to find the motivation to do something truly difficult. As students attempt to see themselves as readers, they can potentially redefine the identity they use to view themselves and their place in the world.

Even with our efforts to help students gain confidence in their reading skills, it can be difficult to find students like Sadie in a class of forty students who each have unique needs. My experience with Sadie highlighted the need for catering to students who need additional support in future classes. Professor Coombs and our research team have been developing a new curriculum for these literacy classes, focusing

on the best ways to specialize and give students the greatest opportunity for success. Part of our development has been focusing on fluency, vocabulary, and summarization practices to give students the confidence to identify themselves as readers and to find the motivation to try.

This experience was revolutionary for me, because suddenly teaching wasn't just about my research or classes. It was about a little girl who told herself that she wasn't a reader. Teaching isn't just about the moments of success; it is also about supporting the students who have been left behind. As we have continued planning the units and lessons for future classrooms, I have seen this little girl in the back of my mind. True education focuses on the qualitative lessons taught to the individual students willing to learn, and it's not preoccupied with the lessons and statistics of success that are so often measured in modern, quantitative-focused education. The way I view success in students has changed from how well they are accomplishing something to how they progress. The willingness to try and the motivation to work hard is something that I no longer take for granted. As a future teacher, I am humbled and grateful for the parents, sisters, brothers, friends, mentors, and so many others who create spaces for students to try, even if they don't consider themselves a reader yet.

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“I learned that curiosity for me is letting myself follow through with my thoughts and become more spontaneous.”

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*Photo by Alexis Sorensen*





Photo by Alexis Sorensen



Photo by Mark A. Philbrick

# Forming Parliamentary Connections



Photo by Emma Westhoff

**I**t was a gloomy Tuesday in January as I splashed my way to work for my first day as an intern at the Scottish Parliament. The rest of my day wasn't any more glamorous. Scrambling to expand my rudimentary knowledge of British politics and battling the residual fog of jet lag, I was intimidated by the

veteran staff surrounding me and felt less prepared with every new assignment I was given. Even the parliament building itself, with its labyrinthine tangle of sharply angled hallways, left me disoriented and wondering how to proceed. The visions I'd entertained of myself as an informed, proactive, valuable member of a parliamentary team felt painfully distant.

I found respite in my supervisor, Meredith. She greeted me cheerfully every morning and took it upon herself to instruct me in everything from the basics of drafting parliamentary motions to the best biscuits to stock the office with for teatime. Slowly, I began to acclimate to my surroundings, although I still depended heavily on Meredith for guidance in my day-to-day work. She was my go-between with the other members of our mostly remote constituency team, whom I knew only as a jumble of names and duties I could rarely keep straight. When I didn't understand how to go about a task or when the nuances of Scottish politics seemed out of reach, finding answers was as simple as swiveling my chair around and asking Meredith.

But it didn't last. Just a few weeks into my internship, Meredith pulled me aside to tell me that she would be moving soon to join her partner at his new place of work—when I asked her where, she excitedly responded, "Brighton!" My heart sank. Meredith was the only other member of my team working in person in Edinburgh. Brighton was on the other side of the country, and the move would require her to transition to fully remote work. I had already struggled to feel confident in my work and connect with the members of my team based several hours away in our Aberdeenshire constituency, and this felt

like the final nail in my coffin.

She was gone before I knew it. The time I spent sitting alone at my desk and at lunch seemed like an eternity. When I had questions or struggled with a task, there was no obvious place to turn for help. I wasn't comfortable enough with the remote members of my team to contact them outside of direct responses, and I was embarrassed to be so visibly alone in the empty office, passed by visitors and staff members from other offices running errands that were surely more important than any of the work I did. I felt like an intruder playing pretend at being a parliamentary intern. With no one there to notice my efforts, I often wondered whether it was worth coming in at all.

Although my situation was far from ideal, I was determined to overcome my isolation and connect with my team and with the parliament as a whole. As a law school hopeful, I had traveled four and a half thousand miles alone to get a foot in the door in the political world. I wasn't about to resign to my fate without a fight.

While I knew many aspects of my experience were out of my control, I focused my energy on the areas I did have control over. I started by joining weekly Zoom calls and group chats, getting to know the team dynamic, and contributing when I could. I took advantage of the unique opportunities the parliament building

offered, attending chamber debates and special events that introduced me to people from all areas of Scottish society and drew my attention to issues I never would have discovered on my own. I approached some of the other teams in the building, developing friendships with everyone from ecologically minded, pro-independence converts to Catholic monarchists, learning about their unique perspectives and values. I took advantage of the opportunities I did have to connect with my own team in person, traveling across Scotland to attend the party conference and meeting them in person for a few short days. I did what I could to ensure my work was high quality and prompt and that it spoke for me.

My plan didn't always go well—I struggled through awkward lunch conversations, attended events that weren't meant for me, and produced some terrible drafts. I learned to embrace the discomfort as an inherent part of the learning process. I had pursued my internship for the express purpose of pushing myself outside of my comfort zone, and every awkward exchange at a charity event or woefully misinformed motion proposal brought me one step closer to the professional I had set out to become.

Despite the occasional hiccup, my efforts paid off. I felt a sense of shared purpose in my work with my coworkers despite the distance, and they came to appreciate my efforts to support them. Rather than feeling stranded at the parliament building, my experience had been enriched by the unique opportunities it offered. I now conversed easily with the same members of staff that I had found so intimidating that first day. What started as a monolith of politically zealous foreigners had become an eclectic gathering of friends. Far from uninformed, I found myself forming opinions on everything from the possibility of a second independence reformation to the revitalization of the Scottish red squirrel population, and I now had the skills I needed to help transform those opinions into real, meaningful change.

I spent the last two weeks of my internship supporting campaign efforts in Aberdeenshire, entirely in person and based at my constituency office for the first time. Without my prior efforts, this experience could have been a series of awkward introductions with individuals who had little reason to take interest in a soon-to-depart American intern. But thanks to the months I'd spent building connections, it was more like a reunion. The time we spent distributing pamphlets, making phone calls to voters, eating local food, and touring the constituency brought us closer as a team and as friends. As voting day approached, our network



Photo by Emma Westhoff



Photo by Emma Westhoff

became larger than I had ever anticipated. Our efforts were magnified by the contributions of like-minded individuals from all levels of British politics as well as dedicated community volunteers, and we found both support and commiseration in ample supply. When the election results rolled out, we celebrated together when the candidates we'd campaigned for took their places on Aberdeenshire Council and lamented our friends who didn't make it. Our efforts had paid off—our constituency pulled some of the best results in the country.

When I first heard that my supervisor would be leaving, I had worried that my isolation would leave me with no chance to develop meaningful professional connections during my internship. But I proved those worries wrong and left Aberdeenshire and Scotland with the warm farewells of a team that otherwise might never have taken much notice of me. Months later, as I began to assemble my applications for law

school, my request for a letter of recommendation was met with a prompt, warm response and glowing reviews. Although my time at the Scottish Parliament is finished, I am still drawing from the relationships and professional skills that I developed over that rainy Edinburgh winter. Sitting alone at my desk in those first few weeks, I never anticipated the opportunities for growth that my seemingly less-than-ideal situation would bring me.



*"Fire by Friction"*  
Best in Show, Kennedy Center Photo Contest Winner  
Kilimanjaro Study Abroad  
Photo by Kendra Billman

Photo by Alexis Sorensen





*Photo by Alexis Sorensen*

“We all dream—but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity. But the dreamers of the day are dangerous, for they may act their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible.”

—T.E. Lawrence

“Tourists don’t know where they’ve been;  
travelers don’t know where they’re going.”

-Paul Theroux



Photo by Alexis Sorensen

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# The ROI of

**T**he first thing I noticed when my husband and I relocated to Oregon for our summer internships was that, unlike the quiet northern Idaho logging town I'd been raised in, Portland smelled like the ocean. More particularly, it smelled like seafood. Those first whiffs hinted to me that the next three months running Pacific Seafood's social media channels would be different than anything I had yet experienced.

I showed up to my first day of the marketing internship with no idea what to expect, having joked with my family that I might very well step onto a shrimp boat and subsequently become lost at sea. The marketing team was housed in Clackamas on the topmost floor of a small, white building—not a boat, though it did smell like the frozen seafood that was being packaged in the distribution center across the parking lot. The speech bubble of a happy, photoshopped trout, proudly displayed on a poster behind my computer, offered me the first pun of many more to come: "You're fin-tastic!"

During orientation, the interns were instructed to spend the next twelve weeks developing a project in our departments and present it to the executive team at the end of the summer. The intern with the best project would receive a full-time job offer, and the project would be implemented company-wide. Several times people told me, "No one from marketing has ever won the competition. It's usually one of the sales or operations interns. The executives like to see projects with a clear and significant return on investment (ROI); it's not your fault that social media is less profit oriented. Just do your best with your project. That's really all that matters anyway."

I sat down at my little desk, staring at the



Photo by Hannah Ackerman

# *A Story Told Well*

photoshopped fish. After several semesters of studying different varieties of English, fictional tropes in the publishing world, and *The Chicago Manual of Style*, running social media accounts felt like a huge tangent from my career goals in publishing. I'd applied for this job to get myself out of the house while my husband worked long hours downtown. I lost myself in my thoughts, wondering, How many times have I even had seafood? I can count it on one hand.

A little glossy booklet slid down the desk just then, bumping into my arm and interrupting my thoughts. It was a copy of the company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) report. I looked up to see my supervisor smiling.

"You can start looking for content ideas in there," he encouraged me.

As I flipped through the pages, I noticed that there was a lot more to the company than just seafood. I didn't know about any of this, I thought as I skimmed the text. Sustainability efforts, community involvement, customer education, the company's rich history, and continual innovations . . . There's a story here. I know how to work with stories. My editing and publishing major helped me learn to work with stories.

I saw the opportunity to expand on the people and the behind-the-scenes efforts of the company, and I knew what my project had to be: transitioning our online narratives from commodity product provider to the brand of choice, grounded in skill and sustainability.

Over the next several weeks, I developed a social media strategy that played to my strengths of storytelling. I identified the characters of

the story (our team members, customer base, and online audiences), the setting (our various locations scattered up and down the West Coast of the U.S. and Canada and the platforms we were on), and the important elements that built value around the Pacific Seafood brand (the company culture and product).

Our team stretched our imaginations as I petitioned for the department to help me bring that CSR booklet to life with a stop-motion animation project. We put together a tabletop scene with sand, driftwood, and a handful of origami crabs, then orchestrated a crashing wave of blue wool that "washed" the report onto our shore. Following the project, our team produced a talking head about the hundreds of pounds of aquatic waste we removed from the environment on World Oceans Day. Inspired by the photoshopped trout friend hanging on my wall, I sat down and began sharing fish-related puns to our Twitter account. During week eleven, I participated in a five-year planning meeting. I helped develop the goals of Pacific Seafood's marketing department for the next several years, pushing for the company to embrace more storytelling.

Finally, in my last week of the internship, I compiled my work into a forty-page strategy report that I published and titled, "The SeaSimply Project." I was determined to not only share the story of Pacific Seafood but also to be a lasting part of it.

Presentation day came: the climactic finale of my summer plot. Was I thinking about the competition and my apparent disadvantage as a



*Photo by Jaren Wilkey*

social media intern? In the back of my mind, of course I was. We all were. I'd already been told it was unlikely that I would win, though, so I tried to focus on the schedule.

The company flew me and the other interns from all over. Each of us had put in dozens of hours to refine our project presentations. I felt myself shaking as I waited my turn; the group had developed an impressive collection of projects ranging from new plant cleanliness processes to ERP integration, oyster quality experiments, and on-site translation tech. Lots of industry research had been done, and lots of ROIs had been calculated. I looked down at my notecards again and hoped simply that the executive team would not think I'd wasted the whole summer. My palms were sweaty as my name was finally called and I stepped to the front of the room. Thirty of the most powerful people in the multibillion-dollar company stared back at me expectantly. I remember swallowing hard as I passed out copies of my published strategy report. I took one trembling breath, and then I began to tell them the story of Pacific Seafood.

The presentation went so smoothly I thought I was daydreaming; as soon as my slides came up, I was able to step into my editing and publishing mindset and focus on the importance of telling a good narrative.

I set the scene of a company working to become the best in the industry by choosing to care for and invest in its environment. I introduced them to the hard-working, diligent, and highly skilled characters of a story that they've known much longer than me, showing it all to them through new eyes. I showcased the work I'd done to bring the company narrative to life with stop-motion animation, graphics, a podcast, and even fish puns.

And, when it was all said and done, I reported that my efforts had ultimately landed their branding in front of more than six hundred sixty thousand people over the past twelve weeks.

I invited the businessmen seated before me to flip through my strategy report, wherein I had outlined all my work and recommendations moving forward with the social media accounts.

After my eleven-minute presentation, both my knowledge of our social platforms and my presentation skills were put to the ultimate test as I answered off-the-cuff questions from the executives for another twenty minutes. Thirty pairs of scrutinizing eyes flitted between me and the scoring sheets sitting in front of them, pencils quietly scratching along.

That night, the executives took all of us interns out to dinner to congratulate us for our

hard work. We laughed about some of our best moments from the summer and reveled together in high spirits, celebrating our big achievements. The projects were finished, the presentations, over.

At the end of the night, our supervisor stood from his seat, hands clasped together.

“Thank you each for all the hard work you’ve done over the past several weeks.”

He moved to retrieve a framed certificate, holding it up and displaying it for the group.

“At this time, we’d like to offer special recognition to the winner of our summer internship challenge,” he said, “who demonstrated to all of us the power that comes when you share a company’s story. Congratulations, Hannah.”

I stood to accept the award. Beaming. Absolutely shocked.

My summer spent with Pacific Seafood taught me that the storytelling skills I learned in the classroom as an editing and publishing major have the potential to benefit every industry. We are surrounded by everyday stories that naturally inspire. In the world of business, I have found that the most

successful marketing strategies are those that share the real-world stories: individuals and businesses alike working together to create positive change.

As I move forward in pursuit of a publishing career, I hope to continue seeking out the stories in unexpected places and discovering more things that connect us across each industry, bringing them to light so they reach us, teach us, and change us.



Photo by Jaren Wilkey



Photo by Lydia Hall



Photo by Lydia Hall

"I hear and I forget.  
I see and I remember.  
I do and I understand."

-Confucius

# *Be Memorable*

I'm just an intern. That's what I always told myself. And in my mind, being an intern meant becoming a shadow. It meant doing the work I was assigned, anticipating my boss's needs, running errands, and ultimately staying out of the way. It would be better to be forgotten than to accidentally turn into a nuisance.

It was the summer of 2022, and I was working as a digital content intern for the Church Magazines and the Church Newsroom. I had been eyeing this internship for years and was thrilled to finally have the chance to work at Church Headquarters in Salt Lake City. My diverse set of responsibilities that summer included writing articles for the Church Newsroom, Church News, YA Weekly, *Liabona*, the Gospel Living app, For the Strength of Youth, and the *Friend*. I also copyedited and coded HTML for articles on churchofjesuschrist.org and created social media content for the Book of Mormon and Strive to Be Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter channels.

It was an exciting job, but I kept myself humble by reminding myself I was just an intern who would be replaced in a few months' time. I was lucky to have been hired at all, and I was there to learn and to stay out of the way. I was a placeholder.

Photo by Gabrielle Shiozawa



So I was surprised when, a few weeks into my internship, my boss, Camille, called me over Microsoft Teams. She said I was doing great so far, praising me for assignments I'd completed and website formatting issues I'd fixed.

The only problem, she pointed out, was that I wasn't treating myself like I mattered.

"You're not just an intern," Camille told me. "When you're here, you're a part of the team, and you need to own that. You need to be memorable."

Be memorable. Could I do that?

I thought back to how easy it was for me to speak up in my BYU journalism classes. In a casual classroom environment where I already knew everyone, it was easy for me to share my story ideas, ask questions, and offer an acquaintance's contact information when a peer needed a source to interview for a story. With my classmates, it mattered less if I made a mistake—we were all trying to figure things out together.

It felt different working at an internship for an organization where some of my coworkers had been working longer than I had been alive. Suddenly we weren't on a level playing field, and I knew it. I had never felt so inadequate, intimidated, and afraid that I would say the wrong thing. In meetings, I felt like I was scrambling to catch up on what everyone else was

already familiar with. I was terrified of making a mistake. No wonder I was quiet!

The same day Camille told me to be memorable, I joined a Microsoft Teams meeting for the Book of Mormon social media team. So far I had just taken on the few writing assignments they'd thrown my way and answered simple questions they'd directed at me during meetings. I hadn't taken the initiative to do any more than that. As an intern, I was still convinced I was better as a shadow than in the spotlight.

But my coworker Bryce surprised me. During our meeting, he proposed an idea for a social media post and waited for the rest of the team to respond. No one did. Waiting in the silence, my eyes drifted to the planner on my desk as I thought about the next meeting I had that day. I didn't even consider speaking up; I was just an intern.

Then Bryce said, "Gabrielle, what do you think we should do?"

Stunned, I returned my gaze to his face on my screen. As I refocused on the conversation, I realized that I did, in fact, have an idea on what we should post—something that maybe they hadn't done before.

After I'd shared my idea, I was immediately bombarded by negative thoughts: That was stupid. My idea is boring. My coworkers think I shouldn't even be

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"I had exercised the courage to share what I actually thought and not just what I thought would make other people happy. From that point on, I began sharing my ideas more frequently, even when my impostor syndrome and negative thoughts persisted."

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on their team.

I watched the screen as Bryce twisted his mouth, pondering my suggestion. I waited anxiously as he looked back into the camera—and nodded.

“Thank you,” he said. “Let’s do that.”

I was even more surprised by Bryce’s approval than I was when he first asked for my opinion—I hadn’t even realized how tense my shoulders were until I felt myself relaxing. I was grateful that, buoyed by Camille’s instruction, I had exercised the courage to share what I actually thought and not just what I thought would make other people happy. From that point on, I began sharing my ideas more frequently, even when my impostor syndrome and negative thoughts persisted.

As I slowly grew more comfortable with speaking up in meetings, I found that I no longer dreaded the long 40-hour workweek. I knew I was among peers, and even among friends. I knew that the contributions I was making mattered. I felt like I was no longer just a shadow—I was significant. Even when I made mistakes or when I didn’t have the greatest ideas, I was still treated with respect, and I learned that even professionals can falter at times. I didn’t have to be perfect. With my newfound courage, I volunteered for more assignments, grew more personally connected with the teams I worked with, and grew to love my internship more than I ever thought I could.

I began to realize that my internship was just another classroom, albeit with a more diverse set of students and different stakes. At BYU, my classmates and I learn from each other. When we speak up in class, ask questions, and share ideas, we grow from each other’s knowledge, insights, and experiences.

At the Church, I didn’t have the same level of professional experience as my bosses and coworkers, but it turned out I had different skills I could offer. When my bosses wondered how to improve engagement, I was able to point out the way that TikTok videos and Instagram Stories have changed the way my generation uses social media. When the teams I worked with wondered what topics they could write articles about to help young adults who are dealing with difficult issues, I talked to my friends and peers and brought back ideas about how we could make a difference through our work at Church Magazines.

I still saw myself as a placeholder, but I also

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“I wasn’t just an intern—I could be memorable.”

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realized that didn’t have to be a bad thing. I shared the ideas I had, and the next intern would do the same. The more experienced people I worked with at the Church taught me about how to work at a global news organization, code a website, write a variety of articles and stories, and communicate a strong media presence. And I brought a fresh perspective as part of their target audience, shared what I had learned in my journalism classes at BYU that had been updated for a digital age, and contributed ideas the team hadn’t considered yet. When my internship coordinator, Mindy, told my fellow interns and me at the start of the summer that it was up to us to choose what we wanted to get out of our internship experience, I hadn’t quite understood what she meant. Wouldn’t I just be doing the job they asked me to do? But after Camille and Bryce helped me learn that being an intern is far more than just being a shadow, I realized Mindy was right. If I wanted more assignments and opportunities to contribute, I could speak up and ask for them. If I wanted to take it easy, I’d be hurt way more than my bosses were because I’d be the one coming away with a meager portfolio at the end of the summer. If I wanted this to be a fulfilling, memorable, and worthwhile experience—and if I wanted to actually have an impact—I needed to step up and make it happen for myself.

I was there to learn, but I was also there to contribute. My ideas mattered.

I wasn’t just an intern—I could be memorable.



*Photo by Gabrielle Shiozawa*





Photo by Jaren Wilkey

# Building Bridges of Conversation:



Photo by Emma Fox

After I had worked as a brand-new writing tutor in the BYU Research & Writing Center (RWC) for a few weeks, a student came to me with an outline for a paper for her Latin American history class. As we went over the assignment description and the in-class instruction she'd been given, I could hear her voice getting tighter and tighter as she described how she'd tried to apply her professor's feedback to her outline. As I looked through her work, I could see that she needed a much more specific thesis and a slight change in her organization.

This situation was familiar to me. The RWC is a collaborative learning space where students from across campus can bring their writing assignments and receive help from fellow students who work as writing tutors. New tutors (like me) are trained in an internship: a combination of weekly instruction on tutoring strategies and on-the-job experience. Interns work to apply what they've been learning in the classroom in real sessions with real students.

I'd just gotten out of my internship class, where we'd talked about motivational scaffolding, cognitive scaffolding, and instruction. These three concepts form the foundation for the tutoring that we use in the RWC. Even after only working there a short time, I expected that I would use all three to help this student better her own writing. What I didn't expect was that by the end of our time together, I'd come to view these tools in an entirely new way.

I knew that first and foremost, this student was far too overwhelmed to feel like she could even work on her writing. I needed to use motivational scaffolding—offering encouragement and establishing rapport—to help her feel

# *The BYU Research & Writing Center Internship*

more comfortable with her assignment and make her more likely to take my comments seriously.<sup>1</sup> I pointed at the research she'd compiled and told her that it was going to provide a really good base for her paper later. I complimented the topic she'd chosen; I was genuinely interested in it and thought that she had set it up well. I could see her visibly relax as she realized that this was something she could handle.

I was ready to jump right into correcting her outline, but I remembered what we'd just discussed in my internship class: the RWC is all about helping writers, not just writing. That's where cognitive scaffolding comes in. This strategy is when a tutor asks questions or offers suggestions that guide students in a particular direction in their writing, requiring students to directly engage with their papers. I wanted to try to give this student "an opportunity to figure out what to do on [her] own"<sup>2</sup> instead of just telling her what to do.

"So, what do you know about writing a thesis?" I asked, inwardly cringing at what I felt was a very stupid question. But the student didn't seem offended. She thought for a minute, then rattled off a textbook definition. Feeling more confident, I then asked her to show me where that was in her outline. She pointed out what I had figured was her thesis and read it out loud. Then she looked at me.

"That needs to be more specific, doesn't it?"

I nodded and asked, "Which part?"

She pointed to the end, and I nodded again. She tightened up the language, and then we spent a few

minutes talking about shifting the focus of the thesis a little more. We ended up with a strong, specific thesis—and I hadn't done anything but ask the student a few questions. Cognitive scaffolding at its finest.

After workshopping the outline a bit, we had about ten minutes left in our session. The student told me she'd never been taught how to write a conclusion. When something like that happens, I turn to instruction: simply telling a student how to do something. While I wish I could help all students with some solid scaffolding, the fact of the matter is that sometimes there are gaps in a student's knowledge that no number of leading questions will fill. Just like motivational and cognitive scaffolding, when I use instruction in the proper place, it becomes a tool that "open[s] up writing's complexity" by helping the student learn new skills.<sup>3</sup> I drew this student a diagram on a piece of paper of a formula for an effective conclusion and felt a little thrill of pleasure as I saw it click in her mind. Through instruction, I'd handed her another tool that she could use the next time she approached a conclusion she was unsure about.

The student and I talked about ending the paper by explaining why her topic was important. As I got this student to tell me about the bigger themes that her paper grappled with and why they impacted history, I saw a light come into her eyes. She wasn't just motivated to finish her paper or confident that she had the knowledge and skills to do so. She was excited because she could see why her writing mattered. Writing is, after all, just a "technologically displaced form of conversation,"



Photo by Emma Fox

a way to communicate ideas to an absent audience.<sup>4</sup> Any conversation requires multiple participants. This student found motivation when she realized that she had something valuable to say, to contribute to a larger conversation.

I was excited too. For the first time, I could see why what I do as a tutor matters as well. Not only can I help students improve their writing by using motivational and cognitive scaffolding along with instruction, but these tools also help me show students why their ideas have true worth and why they deserve to have their voices heard. I believe that all students should feel like their writing is important. Whether it is an op-ed on a topic that has been beaten to death or a summary of research findings or a short rhetorical analysis that will only be read by a professor—that doesn't matter. What matters is that students know their ideas have worth.

Moving my learning from my internship class into

the practical space of the RWC is one thing, but what has been even more remarkable is seeing the tools that I use in the RWC gradually change how I view my own learning. Writing, which I used to view as personal and hermetic—just me and my ideas and a page—has been transformed into a way for me to reach outside of myself. I build bridges as I tutor students and show them how their writing has value. I look for places to build those same bridges in my own writing and learning, shifting my focus from personal understanding to connecting with broader conversations.

William Cronon speaks to this change in his essay “Only Connect...’ The Goals of a Liberal Education.” Defining such an education as one that “aspires to nurture the growth of human talent in the service of human freedom,” he lists several core attributes of a liberally educated person.<sup>5</sup> The final attribute gives his essay its name: only connect. He clarifies that, above

all else, a “liberal education is about gaining the power and the wisdom, the generosity and the freedom to connect.”<sup>6</sup> This ability to connect is manifold—it could refer to connecting with ideas, institutions, societies, or people. We are a long way from the monastic past where education was a solitary pursuit. Our contemporary focus on application of the skills we gain as students speaks to a broader concern for how those skills might benefit others.

The RWC acts, for me, as a liminal space between theory and personal practice. As Kenneth Bruffee suggests, “an effective peer tutoring training course” should be “based on collaborative learning,” and should be “one that . . . makes tutoring a genuine part of the tutors’ own educational development.”<sup>7</sup> I take the theory and tools that I learned from my internship class and apply them every day as I work with different students. But in working with those students, my own approach to writing and learning has changed. When I leave the RWC, I take those values of conversation and connection with me. They inform my own attempts to share my voice, reminding me that I, too, have something to say that matters.



Photo by Emma Fox

#### Notes

1. Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson, “Instruction, Cognitive Scaffolding, and Motivational Scaffolding in Writing Center Tutoring,” *Composition Studies* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 63.
2. Mackiewicz and Thompson, 56.
3. Mackiewicz and Thompson, 56.
4. Kenneth A. Bruffee, “Peer Tutoring and the ‘Conversation of Mankind,’” in *Landmark Essays on Writing Centers: Volume 9*, ed. Christina Murphy and Joe Law. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 91.
5. William Cronon, “‘Only Connect...’ The Goals of a Liberal Education,” *The American Scholar* 67, no. 4 (Autumn 1998): 74, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41200203>.
6. Cronon, 78.
7. Cronon, 97.



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Photo by Alexis Sorensen

# *Experiential Learning*

**F**or the last thirteen years, David Waddell has been engaged in experiential learning programming at BYU, as well as nationally and internationally. He was the founding director of BYU's Office of Experiential Learning where he worked to set university standards for experiential learning and worked with faculty and administrators to enhance experiential learning programs for students. He is currently associate director of First-Year Experience, where he leads the development of a second-year program.

Each of the essays written in this journal represents episodes in the expanded story of each student's personal journey. They illuminate the growth and development that come from seeking



*Tre Cime di Lavaredo, Dolomites, Italy  
Photo by Benjamin Williams*

out and being intentional about the experiences that enhance the traditional college career. They are also microcosms of life experience.

In his introduction to the Spring 2022 issue of *Experience: Stories Beyond the Classroom*, Professor Frank Christianson noted, “We draw upon the events of our past to inform how we act in the present and anticipate the future.” Learning from experience includes recognizing how seemingly disparate events from our past have led to or prepared us for our present circumstances, like our majors, classes, relationships, internships, or jobs. In this case, experiences become the materials we gather into innumerable combinations and quantities to construct our perspective. As we reflect on a series of our past experiences, we can start to recognize the themes, patterns, and trajectories of our lives.

The following is an example of knitting together a set of events that shaped a student’s decision to participate in an international internship. The dialogue is fictional yet depicts the typical conversation that often unfolds as I meet with students seeking advice about their college careers. Note how asking this fictional student questions prods her to analyze the significance of experiences she might have previously considered unimportant.

*Me: Hi, Sarah. Can you tell me why you decided to go to Spain for your internship?*

*Sarah: Sure. I was talking to one of my Spanish professors about my summer plans to go home and work at my old job, and she told me about an internship in Madrid that would pay for me to live there. Since I’ve always been fascinated with Spain, I decided to apply and got accepted.*



*Me: OK. So when did you realize you loved Spain?*

*Sarah: I’m not sure. I’ve always wanted to travel.*

*Me: Me too! But let’s see if you can get a little more specific. That’s a helpful and important part of the process. For example, maybe you did a report on Spain in fifth grade, or in high school you became friends with an exchange student from Spain. There was something, or a series of somethings, that started you down this path. Do you remember what it was about Spain that clicked?*

*Sarah: Hmm . . . well . . . (long pause). In eighth grade*

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Experience + reflection = meaningful experience.

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my class took a field trip to the art museum, and I saw Francisco Goya's painting called *The Third of May 1808*. It was pretty disturbing, not necessarily the art but the subject. I just saw these people being gunned down, which was wrenching, and I wanted to know what happened on the third of May 1808. So, I googled it and read the whole entry and every link that was included. It took me hours. From there I just kept expanding into other parts of Spanish history and culture. I even learned how to make paella.

Me: Really interesting. And I assume you speak Spanish? Did you serve a Spanish speaking mission?

Sarah: Actually, no. My freshman year, I had two roommates from South America, and they were always speaking Spanish and trying to teach me.

Me: That was enough to learn Spanish?

Sarah: Oh no. I guess I would say it really kicked in after one of them invited me to visit her family in Ecuador for two weeks. I didn't understand anything! But I watched and listened to the way they communicated, and I really wanted to participate. So when I got back to BYU, I started taking Spanish classes, and they've been great.

Me: I'm curious—how did you end up with two roommates from South America?

Sarah: Kind of a funny story, but I was supposed to live with a friend from high school. Anyway, her boyfriend came home from his mission the week before school started, and they decided to get married right away, so I had nowhere to go. But her boyfriend lived with the family of one of my Spanish roommates when he was in Bolivia, and they had an extra room. So I took it.

Me: Were you nervous about rooming with two people you didn't know who came from another country and spoke a language you didn't?

Sarah: Oh yeah! Very nervous. I thought a lot about going home and starting a semester later because I had no

other options. But I'm glad I stayed, because they were super nice, and we became great friends. But yeah, it was really scary at first, and we had a few cultural barriers to work out.

Me: Thanks for sharing, Sarah. From what you've told me, it sounds like you've developed a few competencies and strengths that will serve you well during your internship. For example, at a fairly early age you were exposed to a culture and history you were unfamiliar with. You demonstrated significant curiosity, resourcefulness, and initiative as you delved into Spanish culture and history entirely on your own. You also showed adaptability and a willingness to work through challenging cultural situations when you chose to live with your new roommates whom you didn't know and who came from different countries than your own.

Sarah: I never thought about it that way. I just feel like everyone has their own experiences in life. But what you said makes sense.

Me: Have you thought about where this path might take you? Can you think of other examples that have nudged you toward this experience, or the direction you might go after you graduate?

Sarah: Hmm . . . I'll have to reflect on that.

Me: Good. We can talk about options next time!

Sarah's story is unique to her. It is a short history of just one facet of Sarah's development as a college student. It exposes internal and external forces that nudged her along her path to an internship. As she continues to reflect on the specific people and experiences that have influenced her decision-making, her path will become even more individual and will demonstrate more specific competencies and personal attributes. The conversation with Sarah could have explored a thousand different pathways.

American educator John Dewey famously stated that we learn not from experience but from reflecting on experience. For Dewey, reflection should be educative, meaning we teach ourselves what we learn

from experience. Reflection can help us identify and connect seemingly disparate moments, impulses, and decisions that are the result of external influences—a class, a conversation, a job, etc. We can connect what we've done to what we're doing now and what we may do in the future.

Reflection that places our current experience in context with both our past and future can cultivate confidence, hope, and resilience. It also teaches us the value of our experience. There are many possible interpretations, many intersections and overlaps. Our past is as malleable as our present and future. And the lessons can be innumerable. When applied to our vision for our own future, learning from the pivotal

experiences in our past can confirm we're on a good path. And sometimes they send us in a completely different direction.



Seceda Loop, Dolomites, Italy  
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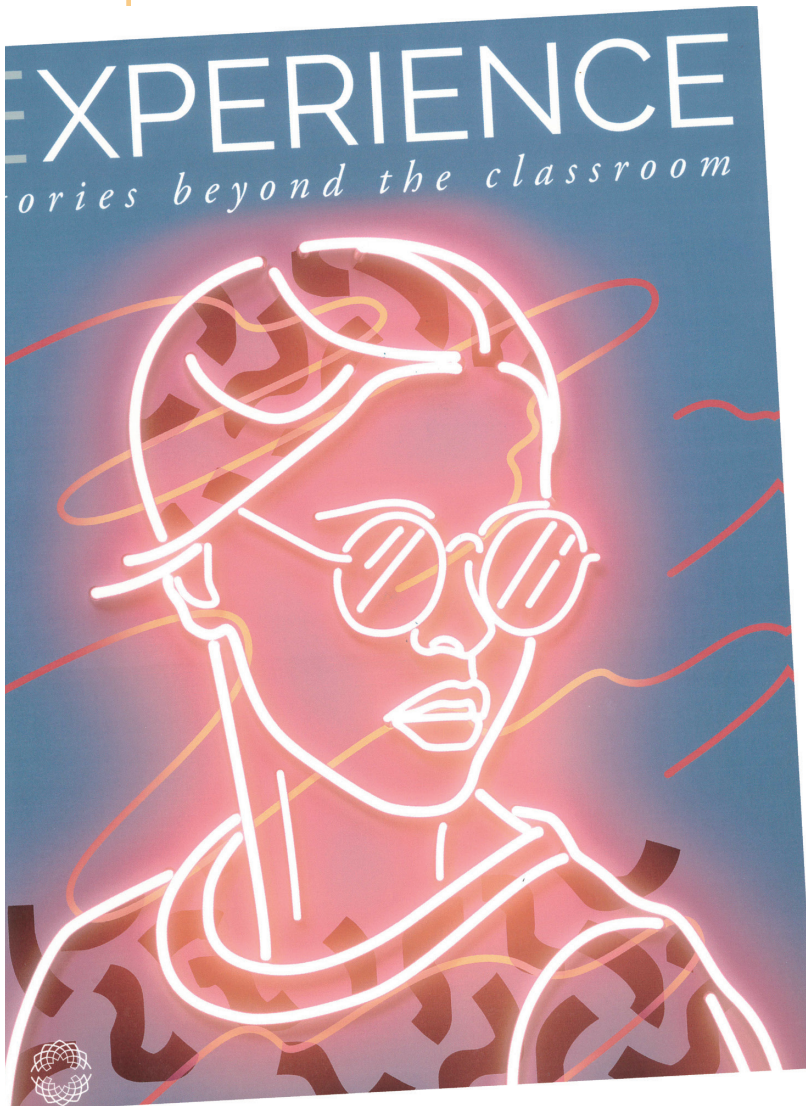
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