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CEP Reflection Essay

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In my application to the University of Washington, I wrote about my diverse educational experience and how I attended nine different schools over the course of my educational path-- including homeschool, a part-time alternative school, several charter schools, a private Christian school, an expeditionary learning school, an urban public high school, and a community college. Reflecting on this, I realize that even after coming to a large public university, my education has still been anything but traditional.

Coming into the University of Washington, I thought I would major in Architectural Design. I began talking to other incoming freshmen, one of which mentioned intending to major in CEP, and another mentioned CEP or Geography. I thought about pursuing urban planning or urban studies-- in my application essay, I also wrote about how I started to think more about urban issues after my two-week travel study trip to San Francisco in the eighth grade. However, I was still very confused by what CEP actually was and thought that UW didn't have an undergraduate urban planning program. I looked more into CEP, read the entire website a few times (back before it was redesigned), and watched an old CEP promotional video. That is when I realized that CEP was the perfect combination of my interests. When it came time to register for classes, I didn't even register for any Architecture classes-- just CEP 200, a Landscape Architecture class, and an introductory Geography course. That quarter I fell in love with all of my classes, and decided to pursue all three programs, somehow....

My first year at the UW, I grew a lot. It was my first time living on my own, my first time working while in school, my first time living in Seattle-- there were a lot of firsts that

year. I learned that groceries are expensive and that most college freshmen don't know how to do their own laundry. I felt very independent, and everything was new and scary. I tried new things that I never thought I would do, and met so many new people every week. That year, my mom and my younger sister moved to Hawaii, and my older sister moved to London. I was used to us living no farther than a few hours apart, and suddenly I was thousands of miles away from my family. It was isolating, and felt lonely at times. Thankfully, I was able to make some good friends during my first year that really supported me.

My first year at the UW was when I really focused on Geography and applied to CEP. I thought that Geography would be a good major to pursue if I didn't get into CEP. I thought it was pretty competitive, because of the entire interview process and additional essay for the application to the major. To major in Geography, all I had to do was get a paper signed by an advisor. Even after I found out I got into CEP, I decided to stick with Geography as well and would somehow figure out how to fit all of my classes into my schedule and still graduate in three years. During this time, I felt a lot of pressure to figure out what I wanted to do right away because I came into the UW with nearly two years worth of credits. If I planned all of my classes just right, I could have graduated in two years, which tempted me to quit CEP before it even started and focus only on Geography so that I could graduate early and save money. However, I knew that CEP was the right major for me, and decided to stay at UW for three years instead.

As I started CEP, I still had very little idea what it was. I remember going to the first meet-and-greet for the incoming juniors, and realized that I recognized a lot of faces already from CEP 200 and other classes. I knew that CEP had a strong community, and that it was focused on urban planning, but beyond that I did not know what I was getting myself into.

Over the summer after my first year at the UW, I spent a couple of months in Hawaii and had a lot of free time to reflect and plan for the rest of my time in college. I thought a lot about what I wanted out of college, what classes I wanted to take, and what I wanted my focus to be in CEP. This is when I knew that I was doing the right thing starting CEP.

Coming into my second year and starting CEP, I realized that finding a balance between CEP and Geography (and my minor in Urban Ecological Design) was easier than I thought it would be because of the overlap between my interests in each program. CEP allowed me the flexibility to combine my interests into one course of study, which was beneficial for me since I had so many different interests.

Fall retreat during junior year was the first time that I started to understand the CEP community. From the talent show, to the afternoon hike, and the bonfire, I started to feel connected to these other weird people who ended up in the same major as me. I was still learning names, but by the end of the quarter, I would finally know everyone in the major. Even though I was beginning to understand CEP and had my academic focus figured out, I felt like the rest of my college experience was very hard at this time. The end of fall quarter was also when I met my current partner, which was at an important part of that year because it was when I needed her connection and support the most.

Winter and Spring quarters of junior year have already started to blend together in my memory. I remember being in CEP 302, finally with the entire class for the first time, and bonding over how much we all disliked the class. Spring quarter in CEP 303 was when I got to know more people on a personal level, especially due to the numerous group projects with a different team every week. Also during spring quarter, I was desperately searching for a summer internship, both so that I could fulfill the internship requirement of CEP and pay my rent. Being rejected by so many internships was actually a true learning experience

for me, and I went from being terrified of interviews to feeling confident even in intimidating interview settings. I ended up accepting two positions, one as an undergraduate research assistant and one as a GIS Intern at the City of Redmond. I had only ever had one job before, as a Computer Lab Assistant in the Geography labs, so before last summer I did not know what it was like to work two mentally-intensive jobs at the same time, let alone just one. I thought I would be able to manage it, and I did, but it was the most difficult six months of my time in college.

Once school started during Fall Quarter of my senior year, I had to juggle too many priorities all at once, and it felt as if they were all competing for my time. My work priorities ended up becoming more overwhelming than school, and I felt as if doing my homework was always an afterthought. I did not put as much effort into school that quarter as I would have liked, simply because I had signed up for too much at once and had no time. I learned a lot from that experience, mainly how to set boundaries and limits for myself. I learned the importance of personal time for my mental health, and the importance of separating work and life. Sometimes, there is such a thing as working too hard.

During Winter Quarter of my senior year, I began a new internship at King County Metro. My school-work priorities were much more balanced, and I had more time to put effort into school. Senioritis, however, started to hit hard, and it seemed as if I would never make it to the end. Senior projects were ramping up, and I didn't know how I would ever figure out what I was doing.

Fast forward to the end of Spring Quarter, and I have somehow made it through. The last half of senior year was when I finally started to feel like I had good friends in CEP, and I almost wish it would last longer. While I was in it, I just wanted it to be over, but now that I've nearly reached the end, I don't want to finish. It will be difficult to maintain all of the

relationships I've built with others in CEP, especially once we won't see each other every day in Gould. However, as a soon-to-be alum of CEP, I know that wherever I end up I will always have this community.