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### **Reflections on my Educational Journey through CEP and Beyond**

My introduction to, and experience with Community, Environment, and Planning, has been defined by community. Between my freshman and sophomore year at the University of Washington, I took a year to travel, experience new cultures, and meditate on what I wanted from my education. I returned to pursue a business entrepreneurship degree, so I could start and run my own bakery. I became disillusioned with my idealistic view of a business degree as I began recognizing the values classes promoted and the money driven attitudes of my peers. The more time I spent with my friends, the more their surprised looks or disapproving comments about the business school prompted further critical thought. Two of my good friends from freshman year were already in CEP, and through their stories about the classes and community, I began to realize CEP mirrored my values much closer than the business school. Soon after, I decided to apply to CEP, and focus on particular aspects of business and leadership I felt would take me closer to realizing my educational goals.

My first quarter taking CEP 301 was very exciting. For a long time, I had tried with great difficulty and little reward to read philosophy on my own. The way the class was structured was most effective and engaging method to teach such a stimulating topic. Through constant discussion, debate and questions, I was able to better understand the texts. As I became more comfortable in my community, my confidence in sharing my ideas and opinions soared. Before, whenever I thought about sharing, my stomach would churn and I could feel my heart pounding in my head. By the time I worked up the courage to say anything, the opportunity was lost and the discussion had moved on. CEP 301 was the first time I consistently shared in a classroom and felt comfortable doing so. Now, I easily share in

classes outside of CEP with confidence and excitement. The class also provided a phenomenal new way of viewing community organizational structures. I began to understand the U.S.'s shift from democracy to oligarchy as money increasingly influences politics. I learned the way the governing structure imposes and defines values for its citizens. I became more aware of my rights as a citizen, and my influence in a community.

The consensus building process in CEP was something I learned from the most. I learned to value input and appreciate challenging viewpoints in this occasionally aggravating but overall rewarding process. This was a time where we as students were able to influence the path of the major, and voice any issues we encountered. Sometimes issues ended as mere complaints, and other times they were taken to committees and steering to be examined. Throughout my time in CEP, student led efforts changed a broken narrative evaluation system to functioning numerical grading system. I saw credits allotted for previously unrecognized time and effort, and am now seeing a possible shift in curriculum to reflect student interests. In steering and governance we had many discussions that included sharing initial draft documents and shaping them into proposed and eventually accepted revisions to the major. The process was incredible to experience and work through that inspired me to model the EcoReps structure the same way. I will speak on this later though.

Throughout this process, some of the aggravation took the form of pessimism and negativity toward the major. I constantly tried to share the positive aspects of the process, and explain how it both promoted community building and individual growth. Eventually I wasn't just sharing, and began trying to convince which led me to harbor resentment and hurt feelings toward particular individuals. As time passed, I realized that it wasn't my responsibility or place to shift values towards the major; instead, I shared my feelings hoping that some positivity provided food for thought.

As my relationship with the community and the major solidified, so did my direction. I strayed from entrepreneurship; instead, studying marketing and social marketing. Classes from the business school, the Evans school of public affairs, and the college of the environment all lent to the completion of my focus. My job at the Environmental Stewardship & Sustainability (ESS) office also reflected this passion. For my job, I created and coordinated the program EcoReps, which is designed to incite sustainable behaviors through peer-to-peer motivation and education. The process of planning, community engagement, promotion and management all relied on my education experience from CEP. The one thing I felt lacking, was mentorship.

I watched as students around me had mentors that pushed them further than they could have gone on their own, and began to realize what I had been missing throughout my experience in the ESS office. I did my best, and created a lasting program that successfully has funding for another year, but I can't help but think I could have done more in the year and a half I worked there. I also felt this in my senior project. My senior project allowed me to creatively combine my education with my passion for music by writing 'Melting Faces, not the Planet,' an out of the ordinary fusion of rock 'n' roll and theatre that follows a young man's journey through love, hope, disappointment, friendship, and climate change. But I had very much difficulty finding a mentor who knew how to approach this project or help me throughout the process. Luckily I plan to continue this project after I graduate, and the connections I made on senior project night may have finally identified a mentor or two for my project. Recently, the UW hired a Broadway professional to create a musical theatre department, and this person is interested in helping me produce my musical. Also, Susanne Moser, a professor of communications specifically interested in climate change, might be interested in examining the possibility of my musical to communicate to new audiences. Both of these people would be extremely helpful in making this musical an educational and entertaining success, and I am extremely excited and appreciative to be in contact with them.

I now approach graduation with a confidence that grew through my experience in CEP and beyond. I'm not sure what adventures lie next, but I trust my education, values, and experience will allow me to explore my interests in a career, internship or AmeriCorps position. I especially look forward to polishing the musical script with mentors, and interested collaborators, and share my passion for music and climate change with a broader audience. Although I will miss CEP, the community I built and lessons I learned will stay with me for life, and guide my future direction.