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CEP 462

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Reflective Essay

 I do not remember my intentions in entering the University of Washington. I think that I entered school more because it was expected of me rather than for the intention to learn. That being said, after a month of sheer anxiety at being in a new city away from home, I began to get excited about learning. My overly optimistic roommate woke up every morning at 7 am, too excited for school to sleep in. I did not feel this way. I have always lived in a cloud of crippling anxiety before I can entertain any sensation of happiness. This process of emotions was exactly what my college career resembled. After two years of being relatively aimless and lost, I found the programs that fit me best, CEP and dance.

Things I have learned in college:

-Don’t ask for permission

-Work hard

- Working hard is fruitful, but don’t doubt you’ll be okay if you relax

-Put your dirty clothing directly into the laundry basket

-Take small steps in big projects

-Do the thing hardest thing to prove to yourself that you can do it

-It’s okay to be sad

-Friendships change

-Be nice to everyone (it’s actually easier)

My collegiate turning point was my decision to double-major in CEP and dance. I cannot imagine being happy in this city, at this University, if I did not choose to participate in the programs I have chosen. CEP has given me a real community; pals to grab beers with, someone to text if my car dies, a support team to to stay up all night working with. We are all so different! We are all so supportive! On the other hand, the dance department has given me a fire for life. I struggle to put into words how much I love dance as an activity, as an art form, and as a way of life. The dance department has sheltered me from a life of blandness and tepidity. Everyday that I walk across 15th, between Meany Hall and Gould Hall, I feel satisfied in my day-to-day existence.

 Starting CEP was a whirlwind, an experience I didn’t realize I was getting myself into until it had already begun. I was excited to have somewhere to be, to talk about the things I cared about with people who also cared. I think the thing I loved the most about CEP was exactly how much people cared, about something, maybe something different than me…but they had real passions. The structure and philosophy of CEP fascinated me. I spent my sophomore year volunteering with Washington Public Interest Research Group, canvassing, and taking environmental politics classes that made me feel like there were no solutions to the issues we were studying. CEP 200 gave me the hope that change could happen if we started small, at a local level. The spark of finding solutions attracted me to CEP. Once in CEP, the structure pushed me. The idea of facilitating class was foreign to me. It felt like a trailblazer in the world of education. I loved being able to control my education, of running the major and deciding its future, but most importantly deciding my own future. As a person with a wide array of interests and a specific draw to governing systems, CEP made sense.

 Throughout all of CEP, I’ve been trying to address exactly what my focus is. CEP is an intentional major, and I’ve felt that I’ve been intentional with every choice I’ve made, but the interests that drive my decisions are a bit scrambled. I arrived at a political science minor because I had taken so many courses out of curiosity during my first two years that I had accidentally accumulated enough credits. With only ten credits left to receive either an urban design minor or a political science minor, I chose to take more political science classes. My summer study abroad had opened me to concepts of urban planning that I had been exposed to previously, but never really had a great interest for. When I was in Europe I started to get seriously excited about planning, but when I returned to Seattle and took 460 in the fall, I changed my opinions entirely. I saw myself being trapped in a career of red-tape and poor public outreach attempts. All the sparkle and shine of judging European bike paths had disappeared when I retuned to the depressing suburbs of Auburn. Political science struck me as more engaging and all encompassing path. The first class I took returning to the department was Civil Liberties and US Courts. It was the most difficult course I’ve taken at the university. Also, it was the best course I took at the university. We addressed issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia through the lens of the US Supreme Court. We learned landmark cases and tried to understand how power shifted to create their resulting decisions. The feeling of activism and hope I had my sophomore year when I entered CEP, started to return. My intentionality had taken many turns, but it had returned to pursuing solutions for the issues that haunted me.

 I never consciously decided to become a dance major-it was an answer to a question I never even asked. My childhood consisted almost solely of dancing. I took my first ballet class at age 4 and stuck with it until I was 12. At age 12, I felt like I had missed out on things that other kids did, I didn’t watch TV, I didn’t go on many playdates, I spent most of my time at the dance studio. I wanted to work hard at school, do well and not be tired all the time, so I quit dancing. I went through high school with a complete loss of identity. I entered college and vowed to dance again, taking my first ballet class after a 6 year break. The dance department grew to be my home. It’s more of a home to me than CEP is, and I think that’s because of the vulnerable and bonding nature of dance. The people that I dance with, my professors and my peers, have seen me at all phases of life. Your emotions, your experiences, your day-to-day happenings; they all play into the way you move. It’s a part of the difficulty of dancing, I feel constantly exposed. I’m putting myself out there in a way that the sensation of speaking in front of a crowd would not create. One of my largest learning opportunities at UW has been my experience with performing in dance program shows. I’ve performed in 7 different shows in the last 3 years. Each performance requires two months of rehearsals. Each piece requires 4 hours of weekly rehearsals. Each show I’ve danced in at least one, maybe two pieces. I’ve been committed to rehearsal time for three years, my weekends are always busy, my weeknights are a balance between class, homework, and rehearsal. Dance shows have taught me how to prioritize my life, what commitment looks like, and how to persevere through tough times. It’s also taught me how to work through fear of failure, and how to create a community that supports one another. To me, the dance program has unintentionally created one of the strongest communities on campus.

 CEP and dance share one important value; they both want their students to succeed, and most importantly, create. CEP supports their students in a way that most other programs do not. Things like facilitating, group projects, governance, internship classes, diversity credits, support grants, and alumni connections are all resources rich with potential. Our senior projects have enough freedom that we get to pursue exactly the project that we care about most, meaning that the projects we create take on a larger roles than just an academic assignment. Most students, if given the opportunity, would love to continue their projects. That drive comes from the support of a program that wants its students to pursue its passions. Similarly, the dance program has also planted a seed of creativity in its students. We have multiple opportunities to create and show our work, to dance and learn, and to connect with the community. Our classes are geared towards educating us for a future in the dance world post graduation. I’ve made work that has the opportunity to be put on a professional stage. The dance program allowed me to cast dancers, choreograph, spend money on costuming, and market the show to the Seattle community. Without UW dance giving me that starting opportunity, I’m not sure I could say I’d pursue creating individual work in the future. Both CEP and dance have given me experiences that I will use to forge a path in whatever my future endeavors hold.

 I’ve been wondering why leaving these programs has been so heart-breaking. Why have I dreaded the last week of classes, knowing that saying goodbye would result in an unbearable amount of emotional exhaustion? I love CEP because I love the people in CEP. The program has shown me the potential for a motley crew of strangers to genuinely care about each other. CEP has shown me how to question my reality and my path. The dance program has taught me how to work through fear, how to love myself when I falter, how to learn and grow inside a craft that is in its nature, competitive. The dance program has given me opportunities to learn from my idols. I’m so thankful for the path I’ve taken thus far, and despite not knowing exactly what I will be doing in the future, both CEP and the dance program have given me the tools to effectively steer my passions.