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The Walrus Internship

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Hina Afzaal

Experiential Learning Essay

2 October 2018

Final Report – The Walrus

I have a passion for literature that goes beyond academia. I was first exposed to children's literature during my childhood where my hobby first began. In university, I turned my hobby into a prospective career. I have always been a part of school clubs and organizations to gain more experience about the publishing industry. This range includes working as an editor for the *Symposium*, the *Semicolon*, and *The Western Gazette*. Now as I approach graduation, I want to make that career into a reality because it is something I have been working towards for as long as I can remember.

I had no time to find housing when I got my acceptance email from Renee. However, I quickly said yes to her job offer and began looking for housing. However, I quickly realized that no one was willing to rent an apartment for just a month or two, so I decided it was best to commute from my home in Waterloo. I purchased a greyhound bus pass, and my typical day would start at 5:00 a.m. so I could get to work by 8:00 a.m. I wouldn't get home until 8 p.m. or even 9 p.m. depending on traffic. Not to mention the half hour walk from the station to the office and back twice a day. I was exhausted when I eventually returned home every night. But I never lost momentum, I was positive that this was an experience that was worth everything I had. My energy. My money. And my time.

Working at *The Walrus* meant I was one step closer to having real-world experience in what I

considered my dream job. Ever since I watched *The Devil Wears Prada* I knew two things: interns fetch coffee and that despite #1 working at a magazine was still my dream job. I also came to terms with the harsh reality that I wouldn't make much money starting out my career because not only was landing a job as a junior editor challenging, but it also did not pay well. I knew that in order to reach my goal, it would take many years of effort where I probably did not live very lavishly. However, when I started my internship all those fears and apprehensions that convinced me to look at other job opportunities, came to a halt. I loved my job. On my first day at the office, I felt more confident than I had in years. I was only in first year, yet this new job in a new city did not scare me. It felt right. I thought I was a perfect fit for the job, and that I had all the necessary capabilities that would be needed throughout my 8-week internship. I found out later that I was my boss Cody's first intern. Cody was the digital director at the time, and he managed the magazine's website. Over the next couple of weeks, we gained a mutual understanding of how to work alongside each other, and how to maintain a professional yet personal relationship. I never felt inferior to my bosses, the other one being Harley who was the editor. He managed magazine pitches, art work and frequently wrote his own articles on our website. Together, Harley and Cody published numerous articles a day pertaining to politics, culture, and memoirs to name a few. Cody handled the design and coding behind the website, while Harley managed what we should publish, how we should publish it, and when. My role fit somewhere in between those two job responsibilities. I handled a lot of the coding behind our website, while learning about magazine pitches, copy editing, and how to pick catchy artwork and pull-quotes.

Every so often, we would have workshops where we would learn about pitching, copy-editing, and fact-checking. All very important techniques that are necessary in the publishing industry. I

was grateful for the mentorship and advice I received during those classes. It also showed me how much I still had to learn if I wanted to be a successful editor. It helped me understand what I did not know, which was equally important to what I did know.

Being at The Walrus gave me a better understanding of their office culture, which was very different than what I had traditionally expected. To my delight and surprise it was more laid back and friendly, than professional and uptight. There was a strong “work hard, play hard” mentality which meant as long as you got your work done, no one was going to tell you when or how to do your job. I enjoyed that aspect of my internship very much. I never felt like I was being bossed around. Once I proved my work ethic and aptitude, Cody and Harley gave me a lot of leeway when it came to my work hours. I was free to come in later than normal, or leave earlier if I finished my work for that day. They appreciated my effort and saw the results, rather than penalizing me for the amount of hours I worked that day.

Typically, my week would start off by sending our subscribers the weekly newsletter. Our newsletter would inform our subscribers of the latest articles that we had just published the week before. I used mail chimp to input HTML and the appropriate code so the subscribers would get an email that was “clickable” and catchy. After that, I would help Harley publish several articles online every day. I would receive a word document of the article that Harley had recently approved to be published. My job was to implement the appropriate code in the appropriate place so that we could use WordPress to publish the article later. WordPress would translate the code into specific instructions, which would transform the word document into an online article that met all the editorial styling and formatting standards. I would do that several times a day depending on how many submissions Harley had approved, and the length of each article.

Slowly, I began accustomed to the HTML that I had to use on a regular basis, and I sharpened my grammar. When I first started my internship, I had no knowledge of HTML, much less WordPress or mail chimp. However, by the end of my first week I felt as if I had been working there for all of my life. My co-workers were courteous and friendly. I built a very efficient relationship with both of my bosses, to the point where I could presume what my next job or assignment would be, while also taking the initiative to do work I was *not* told to do, but would obviously need to get done in the near future. I attached a lot of value to my internship, not only enough to make my lengthy commute worth it, but also a lot of personal value. I felt a sense of accomplishment every time I finished an assigned task, or even after a day of hard work. I slowly began to take on more responsibilities, and asked Cody if there was anything else I could do to help him out. After over-seeing my work for a couple of weeks, he finally felt confident giving me more (and harder) tasks. We started off by re-vamping the magazine's YouTube channel, which was outdated and under-used. I was in charge of uploading our newer Walrus Talks onto our YouTube channel, assigning a new "tag" to the video, and inserting a title. In addition, I had to update previous video titles to align with the newer formatting and do the same for the older "tags." Uploading the YouTube videos usually took longer than anticipated because there were 10-12 videos for each Walrus Talks event. However, I took the initiative to finish uploading the videos when I got home so we could upload as many as possible. The work was tedious and repetitive, but I knew I was contributing to a bigger picture – making our YouTube channel and website more user-friendly and aesthetically pleasing.

When I first started working at The Walrus I was only 19 years old. I had only had one SASAH class so I was not able to apply any previous knowledge I had to my new job. However, being a SASAH student gave me confidence, which helped me excel in my internship. In second year, I

had to take SASAH course with Professor McDayter, which focused heavily on HTML and I was able to show off the skills I had learned during my internship in a classroom setting. I actually found myself really enjoying his class because it brought back all of the skills I had acquired during my internship. My internship experience was a matter of time, if I had waited until third year to complete my internship I would have been better prepared, but due to my enthusiasm I wanted to gain as much experience as I could, as fast as I could – and I don't regret it.

One of the biggest struggles I faced, apart from my commute was finances. The internship was unpaid, which caused a financial strain when I had to commute and pay for things such as a bus pass and cab fare. In addition, working away from home meant I was eating out – a lot! This added a lot of financial strain on me as a student, because traditionally I had worked over the summers to save money for college. This was the first time I was sacrificing making money, by working for the experience. Although it was an easy sacrifice to make, the financial burden of my unpaid internship reared its ugly head when it came time for my housing deposit for 2nd year. I had no money saved up, in fact I was losing money so I had to rely on my parents for a lot of my finances during my 2nd year of university. Another struggle I faced as a result of my lengthy commute was the little time I had for myself, family and friends. It was the first summer since starting university because I had moved out the year before. Being back home felt nice and familiar, but I could not spend a lot of time with my family because I would come home, eat dinner, shower and sleep. I felt like my days were not long enough for the amount I wanted to accomplish and it brought me down. I also had no time for friends that I had hoped to spend time with since I was back in my old hometown. I only had the weekends and they were usually filled with errands, family events (I have a big family), and chores.

I learned several lessons during my internship, one of the most important being that no job is too small. As an intern, I expected to do a lot of grunt work, and I was right. I often got handed the jobs that no one else wanted to do, but I loved it. I seized every opportunity I could because it meant more experience. As soon as I started getting used to my routine, it was almost my time to leave. My internship was almost over! It was the fastest 8 weeks of my life.

To my pleasant surprise, Cody had spoken with Renee about extending my time at The Walrus. During what I presumed would be my last week of work, Cody approached me and asked me if I had any other commitments for the rest of the summer. Assuming he was making an attempt at small talk I told him I did not have anything planned, and that I would probably spent the next few weeks relaxing and preparing to go back to school in the fall. He then told me he had spoken to Renee about finding funding to extend my internship because they wanted me to not only stay for a few extra weeks, but pay me as well! I was overjoyed and readily accepted my new contract. The Walrus was generous enough to compensate me for my commute in addition to everything else. I was so grateful that all of my hard work had paid off.

As soon as my contract began, Cody and I made a plan to finish revamping the YouTube channel before I left to go back to school. Cody had started giving me a lot more creative initiative when it came to making decisions. I started trusting my own judgment more and relied on his approval even less. Together, the two of us successfully uploaded every Walrus Talks on old hard drives on to our YouTube channel. While I was uploading and editing the last video on YouTube, Cody came out of his office and updated all of our co-workers on the amount of work we had accomplished. I got a round of applause from everyone and it made all those long, exhausting nights worth it.

On my last day, Renee invited our entire office out for drinks to bid adieu to my time at The Walrus. I was so touched when everyone took the time to come out after work. Renee was teary-eyed and she told me I was special – “we don’t do this for every intern” she said. I felt myself getting emotional, and I knew I made connections that would last a lifetime.

Now, three years later I’ve started to change trajectories and try marketing. I recently finished an internship at Eagle Eye – also through SASAH. Now looking back, the accumulation of both of my internships have taught me a lot about what I want to do and what I enjoy. I went into publishing because I wanted to be creative, while maintaining my love for literature. It was a perfect fit! I would get to be creative and create content. My internship at The Walrus helped my passion for the publishing industry grow even larger than it already was. However, it also forced me to face the drawbacks of that career path. Due to the overwhelming realization of how competitive the publishing industry was – despite my attempt to gain as much experience as I could before I graduated – I began to look at other jobs that I would not typically think of as being “creative” or “suitable” for an English major. I applied to Eagle Eye so I could explore marketing and see if my arts background had any place in business. To my relief, my boss – Sean also had an arts background in philosophy. I saw his success and felt comfort in knowing that not all jobs in marketing require business backgrounds. In short, I would say my internship at The Walrus pushed me to explore non-traditional jobs for creative backgrounds like myself. It inspired me to push myself and try something new. I had my heart set on editorial jobs for as long as I can remember. Even all of my extracurricular activities revolved around editing for the school magazine or newspaper. Becoming an editor was not only a dream, but something I had been aspiring towards since high school. Being an editor was comfortable and familiar, and I felt confident when I entered a room knowing I was meeting other people of my own caliber and

aptitude. I never doubted my ability to reach my goal of a senior editor, or editor-in-chief of a highly-acclaimed magazine or newspaper. However, after The Walrus I began to realize that my resume was not as diverse as I had hoped. I realized I was closing doors for myself by not being open to more opportunities. I realized my passion could become my downfall if I did not at least try to explore other career options. That was when I realized how much my time at The Walrus had helped me grow. In a lot of ways, I am grateful that had the opportunity to “test” out a potential career path before having those same realizations after I graduated. As I begin to apply for jobs in my 4th year, I’m even more grateful that my internship at The Walrus inspired me to explore other career options. There are a lot more marketing positions available right now in comparison to the publishing industry which is both competitive and difficult to navigate. I recently went to the career fair and spoke to many companies about their entry-level marketing jobs that would be available in April 2019. However, the publishing industry does not operate via recruitment. To be honest, it is not needed. They have an abundance of eager applicants who would not only love a job, but would work either unpaid positions or positions with lesser income. If I had not interned at Eagle Eye, I would be deprived of job opportunities and would find myself even more anxious about the future than I already am. Not only did my internship at The Walrus help me make important decisions about my future, it also helped me strengthen skills that I used during my internship at Eagle Eye. I used skills like communication, writing, and networking, which I acquired during my first internship. This also taught me the similarities between my otherwise very different trajectories. I realized I had a lot of transferrable skills that I could apply in many different areas, in many different ways. I also have the interdisciplinary aspect of SASAH to thank for making me as well-rounded as I am.

When I delivered my visual presentation I emphasized how I took away something more

valuable than basic skills – I took away abilities that tested my new aptitude for knowledge that I applied to many jobs, and even industries. My internship at The Walrus made me grateful to have chosen a program like SASAH because it allowed me to grow as a student and an individual. I feel confident entering the workforce because of the experience I gained before even graduating. Furthermore, my decision to do an internship while I was in first year allowed me to learn the value of an internship beyond the superficial skills they have to offer. I have changed pathways and although my future career will probably differ from the one I had originally anticipated; I can not undermine the value of my experience because it gave me the opportunity to exercise my interdisciplinary background. I proved to myself that I can enter a job for the experience and take away skills that can be applied to numerous occupations and although they may be non-traditional, it does not make me any less qualified.

My internships, much like SASAH, have reconfirmed why an interdisciplinary program is necessary. SASAH accepts many majors outside of Arts and Humanities and it allows students to combine two vastly different worlds together (like Ivey Business and SASAH). It gives students the opportunity to learn skills pertaining to their respective major, but it also introduces a world of arts that is very flexible and non-traditional. And even though that was difficult at times, I realized that you can make this program whatever you need it to be. For me it was about being given opportunities that few students were given access to, and the emotional support of peers and professors that would help along the way. However, for others it offered an escape from the traditional classrooms they found themselves caged in due to a lack of creativity and free-thought.

I have often found myself having to defend my decision to choose arts because it is seen as being unemployable. However, I would argue that we are more employable than other students - who

no doubt - graduate with skills that are employable but lack versatility. A medical science degree can not be applied to different industries or jobs, same with computer science, or even nursing. However, they are marketed as being employable degrees because they reassure individuals that they will guarantee a job. But at the same time, it makes them severely lacking in other areas. I know my English degree will be undermined by many, but it took a lot of hard work to get to where I am, and I would rather have the versatility that my program offers because I can turn it into any prospective career that I want. I plan to do a one-year post-graduate diploma in Public Relations, but I know I could change my mind and do marketing, human resources, or even journalism. And I value the freedom to choose my career instead of my degree choosing it for me.



Renee Montpellier <officemanager@walrusmagazine.com>

Fri 4/21/2017, 11:51 AM



✓ Show all 4 attachments (7 MB) Download all Save all to OneDrive - The University of Western Ontario

Hope all is well - FYI...just wanted to let you know you are mentioned in our all staff message towards the bottom of the email.

R

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Cody Gault** <cody@walrusmagazine.com>

Date: Fri, Apr 21, 2017 at 2:16 PM

Subject: Notes on website updates

To: allstaff <allstaff@walrusmagazine.com>

Cc: Michael Landry <mlandry@paxculturastudios.com>, Justin Girard <justingirard@paxculturastudios.com>

Dear Walrus gang,

I'd like to give you all a little bit of information about the suite of updates we've just released at thewalrus.ca. But, before I do, I want to thank **Justin Girard**, our lead developer, and **Michael Landry**, who works with Justin, for the tremendous work they've done to make this happen. Without them none of this would have been remotely possible. We need to get them into the office for an endless high-five circuit.

As far as the changes: Many of them are not visible. They are structural changes that make our website more easily read by the software used by people with impaired vision and search engines. In both cases these changes are stepping stones to greater things. In the case of accessibility it brings us a step closer to being able to seek accessibility accreditation, which, aside from being the right thing to do, is required by law for all Ontario-based non-profits with 50 or more employees. (I know we aren't yet there, but we ought to be prepared for the day.) The latter brings us a step closer to being able seek induction into Google News, which, aside from the immediate audience boost that comes from having your content appear in Google News, means that any new page we publish or edit would be immediately indexed by Google. (In other words, we wouldn't have to wait for Google to list our stories and announcements.)

As far as visual changes, I've noted them below. Each "fig" relates to the attached image of the same name.

Fig. 1

- The top of the homepage features a more prominent navigation menu. This is in response to feedback we've received from readers (and in our latest round of Editorial Fellowship applications) that browsing content on our website is difficult compared to other websites.

Fig. 2

- Standard story pages now have more prominent buttons for sharing on Facebook, Twitter, and Email. These buttons already existed in the "Share" menu, but some readers complained that they could not find them (presumably because they are used to seeing them near the headline on other websites), so we've made them immediately visible.
- Standard story pages now feature a button for toggling between the standard font size and a larger one. This is for people with limited vision.

Fig. 3

- Standard story pages now have a sidebar at the top, right-hand side of the page for a house ad. I've added a magazine cover and subscribe button for now, but we will experiment to figure out how we can use this new tool to drive subscriptions (or donations or whatever else we want).

Fig. 4

- Video story pages now feature the main video, plus a playlist of all other videos from a particular Walrus Talk. There is also a call to action to get tickets for a Walrus Talk. In addition, below each post has a waterfall of all our videos (not shown), which makes finding other videos easier.

There are a few other visual changes, such as minor improvements to how the menus work. But the only other thing of real note is that the new way we are presenting our catalogue of content would not have been possible without last-year's all-star intern, **Hina Azfaal**, who waded tirelessly through our archives to help me make sense of it all.

We still have a ways to go. But I think for the first time we have a website that can showcase (nearly) all of the excellent work you all do.

Please let me know if you have any questions. All the best,

Cody