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SASAH Experiential Learning Opportunities: Western Heads East and the Iconoclast Collective

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SASAH Experiential Learning Opportunities: 2020-2021

Part One: Western Heads Remote Internship

The knowledge and wisdom I have gained throughout my three months as a Western Heads East (WHE) intern have exceeded my expectations. My experiences as a WHE intern have reinforced the importance of, and have allowed me to create room for, academic and personal growth. Additionally, being forced to be productive during COVID-19 has allowed me to further develop my independent learning practices. In this summative report, I outline the valuable work my team was able to accomplish, reflect on how my experiences have positively altered my outlook on productivity and collaboration for future academic and working endeavors, and urge other SASAH students to engage with experiential learning opportunities.

The primary project my team was tasked with was to design a website for our community partner, MikonoYetu, which is an organization that encourages the empowerment and economic independence of young girls and women residing primarily in East African communities, through numerous programs and Fiti yogurt production. My team formed a collaborative working relationship with MikonoYetu, to create a platform they felt genuinely represented their mission. Our secondary project dealt with overseeing the WHE website. This process included reviewing the current website and making recommendations with the intention of improving user experience and amplifying WHE's goals and programs. The expected deliverables of the primary

and secondary projects were achieved, and my team and I are satisfied with the outcomes of the partnership.

The skills I used and developed throughout the internship consist of both personal and professional strategies. The professional skills I employed include general aesthetic and web design, along with professional-level communication and writing skills. While I had basic experience with the former, I began to understand how difficult creating a satisfying aesthetic can be, especially when these skills are being employed for the benefit of those outside a North American perspective. The personal skills I engaged with include the practice of self-reflexivity when recognizing my privileges and the power dynamics between Global North and Global South communities, as well as adapting to different communication strategies with acknowledgement of these cultural differences. Overall, this internship has improved many of my professional skills, and I will harness these improvements within future endeavors.

The professional and personal skills I employed were fundamental in allowing me to build relationships throughout this internship. The primary relationship my team and I built was with the team of MikonoYetu, which consisted of Executive Director Maimuna Kanyamala and her trusted executives. This relationship was formed and maintained through professional emails and communication via WhatsApp to account for the international differences of service providers. My team wanted to establish a transparent relationship to ensure the MikonoYetu team was comfortable sharing any concerns or requirements they had for the new site, since they had experienced communicative difficulties with past content creators. Another relationship I built was with the SASAH team, consisting of Rebecca and QingXiao. We sustained this relationship through constant communication on Facebook Messenger and Zoom to ensure consistent alignment of ambitions and equal workload. The last relationship I built was the

collaborative partnership with my WHE mentors, Stephanie, Bob and Maria. This relationship involved weekly meetings via Zoom calls and email updates. All three relationships were essential in forming my positive internship experience, as each was supportive and helpful in addressing any challenges that were encountered throughout.

The mentorship I received throughout my time as an intern was continually informative and encouraging. Despite a change in mentorship halfway throughout (e.g. Maria took over for Stephanie), the transition was extremely smooth. My mentors maintained constant communication to ensure my team always felt well-supported. During our weekly meetings, they asked well-informed questions and raised thoughtful points, which aided my team immensely in accomplishing our primary goals. They gave great advice and always offered to take initiative in strengthening our relationship and overall communication with the MikonoYetu team. They were extremely flexible with the knowledge my team was working in the midst of the pandemic and helped greatly in maintaining our team's morale to finish our projects despite any challenges we were faced with. The guidance of my mentors has shown me the value in not only being accessible to one's mentees, but also the importance providing valuable and specific advice. Without the help of my mentors, the work my team and I completed would not have been possible.

This opportunity was fundamental in allowing me to reflect on my past academic experiences. I began to understand that educational systems are based upon a system of merits, for which good grades are often valued over any gain of applicable knowledge. This results in the creation of competition with grades and it can be easy to forget the significance of actual learning. In many classes, I retain very little knowledge because of my stress that comes with over-trying to achieve high grades. This defeats the purpose of learning itself. However,

experiences like the WHE internship remind me that there are existing opportunities in which academic success is not the only path for achievement. This experience has allowed me to appreciate the process of learning new things, instead of focusing only on deadlines.

This experience has also provided me with various opportunities to apply my previous technical experience acquired through the SASAH program to working situations. For example, the knowledge gained in ARTHUM 2230G helped immensely with basic knowledge of web design and user experience throughout the creation of the site for our community partner. Further, being in SASAH has greatly improved my communication and writing skills, specifically as they are required in professional settings. One example of this is the SASAH course ARTHUM 3380Y, taken in my third year. This course helped me to create a cohesive LinkedIn Profile, and taught me how to convey my personal and professional skills within resumes and cover letters. These teachings were specifically helpful during the application process of the internship, and also during communication sessions with the MikonoYetu team and my WHE mentors. After taking this course, I was able to participate in these formal settings in a confident manner. While I have provided clear examples for two SASAH courses which have equipped me with transferrable skills, many of my SASAH courses collectively contribute to my development.

This internship has also taught me many valuable personal lessons. One of these personal lessons includes the importance of having an open mind when entering a new environment. At its start, thinking back as far as my first interview, I remember my primary goal being to maintain an open mind, since I had very few ideas regarding what to expect. While I had previous academic experience that involved researching women's empowerment in the Global South, I had no prior background when it came to first-hand engagement with individuals in developing countries. When I was selected for the internship, I was nervous and excited for everything that

was to come. One main reason I was nervous was that the COVID-19 pandemic had just recently begun, and I had no expectations for what a remote internship would look like. However, I was also excited because I originally thought the pandemic meant I may not have been able to secure an internship for the summer. Thus, one personal lesson this internship has taught me is to enter any foreign experience with an open mind, because the newfound knowledge I have gained from doing so is unique to any other experience I have had in my last three years at Western.

A second personal lesson I learned throughout this internship was the need to recognize the value in focusing on the process of a project, rather than merely the end goal. Due to the pandemic and technical difficulties, a primary challenge my team and I faced included feeling a lack of productivity in achieving our desired outcomes. For example, accessing MikonoYetu's former site, which would serve as a great template for the site we would create, included various delays due to platform and password issues. These obstacles resulted in unwanted delays for what my team and I could accomplish, while we waited for this information to be sent to us. However, while these problems were undesirable, they forced me to reflect on the reasons why these delays were causing me to feel so anxious. I eventually concluded that due to the constant pressure of deadlines in my academic life, the idea of not fulfilling a deadline was a point of stress. However, this experience taught me the value of having patience throughout an ongoing project. There are many uncontrollable barriers that come with such a project (e.g., technical issues, communication difficulties, etc.), and rather than dwell on what my team has not accomplished, it is important to instead focus on what we have achieved. This mentality of appreciating and finding comfort in the process of a project is an important lesson this internship has taught me, which I will carry on to my future projects.

Further, my experience as a remote intern has positively altered my values and beliefs in regard to how I view working with international communities within developing nations. I have always had a passion regarding human rights with a specific interest in the lived experiences of marginalized women and children. Working with MikonoYetu has broadened my thinking to the unique challenges faced by these organizations, and I am inspired by their determination to be successful when it comes to their groundbreaking work. Being granted the opportunity to understand their needs has expanded my mind; while I previously viewed most projects, including those that deal with web design, with a perspective catered strictly to North American audiences, working with Maimuna and her team has shown me the further opportunities that arise when working for international organizations. Additionally, working as an intern with WHE has continually showcased that good results take time. The work has been extremely rewarding, despite being gradual both due to technical difficulties and COVID-related reasons. MikonoYetu has not had a live website in eight years, yet my group and I were able to create one! I have been empowered by the work completed by my team and am happy with all we were able to accomplish in spite of challenging circumstances and would encourage other SASAH students to seize similar opportunities of experiential learning based on my own positive experiences.

In conclusion, working with MikonoYetu as a remote intern has shown me that I have an interest in working for causes related to women's empowerment, both in North America and beyond. I desire to continue engaging with this work and feel grateful to WHE for granting me these opportunities. I started this internship with an open mind and leave with an open mind, excited for all I have been given the chance to accomplish and how much more my newfound experiences will enable me to achieve. While this has been a short-lived experience, the lessons

learnt from this internship will remain fresh in my mind and I am looking forward to being able to apply them within my future academic endeavors and beyond.

Part Two: Iconoclast Collective Directorship

With my time as an Iconoclast director coming to an end, one of the first questions that comes to mind is, “is it already done so soon?” Perhaps this past year seems to have gone by so quickly because it has been filled with accomplishment and opportunities for learning that are specifically owed to my role on the director team. My Iconoclast directorship has consisted of many personal achievements, the use and growth of various skillsets, the creation of significant relationships and the gain of valuable lessons that I could not have acquired elsewhere.

Taking on the position of co-director for Iconoclast has provided me with various opportunities to perform work that I was previously familiar with, as well as work that has been entirely new to me. My core responsibility was overseeing and coordinating a team of twenty-five to thirty Western University students for the publication of two separate biannual Iconoclast issues: (UN)HEARD for Fall 2020, and STARDUST for Spring 2021. Many secondary duties have stemmed from this primary role. One secondary duty has included keeping up communication with Iconoclast team members, Arts and Humanities council members and publication contributors. This communication has consisted of instant messaging, primarily through Slack and Facebook Messenger, emails and Zoom call meetings. Another secondary duty was creating timelines for publication, and volunteering to accomplish many different tasks to support the success of these deadlines. Some of the tasks that I took on throughout the publication process have included sending acceptance and rejection emails to contributors, as well as reviewing and recommending edits to work submitted by our graphics team. Lastly, this directorship also required the organization and planning of a launch party for each semester’s

issue. My contributions for prep for the launch parties has mainly included recruiting contributors to speak about their creative pieces at the event and meeting with the events and music and entertainment teams to coordinate the party itineraries. Lastly, being a co-director has also involved conducting interviews and reviewing candidates for team members a part of Iconoclast this year, as well as Assistant Directors for next year. Overall, completing both familiar and new work was an exciting process, and these duties were unique to this directorship.

The work I have completed as an Iconoclast director has been extremely varied, which has allowed me to utilize and develop many different skills for use in both academic and personal settings. For example, I have constantly employed and developed my communication and collaboration skills. With the pandemic, in-person team meetings and interactions have unfortunately not been a possibility this past year. This development has forced me to rethink and adjust my communication skills; whereas before, I mostly connected with others in person, this not being an option has forced me to become more accustomed to online networking. For example, this year, the Iconoclast team used the platform Slack as its primary means to communicate. While similar to Google Team, which I had used before, Slack was an entirely new program for me, and it was slightly challenging to familiarize myself with it, considering the many features that it offers. However, after much trial and error, I have become much more comfortable with using Slack for Iconoclast and any other future teams.

Another main skillset I have used and developed throughout my directorship has been my organization skills. While prior to this experience I have had opportunities to lead large teams for the purpose of events (i.e. Events Coordinator for Mustang Events at Western University), managing small teams was fairly new to me. To clarify, Iconoclast is split up into seven teams: directors, events, music and entertainment, graphics, finance, podcast and social media. It can be

difficult to keep up with the different groups, especially since they each have their own responsibilities. To remedy this, the director team created and followed numerous lists containing required duties and their associated team, allowing us to remain organized and reduce confusion. A third skill that I used and developed throughout my time as co-director was the judgement of creative submissions. As I had never previously been in a position to review creative work, it was a new experience to assess the work of others. Throughout the year, I became much more comfortable in my judgement of artistic quality and eventually felt that I had gained a better grasp on what art pieces were appropriately catered to and fit for each Iconoclast issue. Thus, the variation in tasks that I have contributed to throughout my directorship have allowed me to further develop skillsets that I previously had, as well as gain new ones.

One of the primary aspects of my directorship that made it such a rewarding experience was the relationships built throughout, including with the Iconoclast teams and my mentor. This year, my co-directors and I set a goal to maintain and emphasize the collective aspect of Iconoclast. We focused on this goal by asking our team for their valued suggestions and input for major decisions, including theme options and launch-party festivities. This allowed us to maintain a collaborative relationship with our team, ensuring that everyone felt that their voices and contributions were heard. Another relationship I built throughout my directorship was with my co-directors. Initially coming into this position, I was nervous with the knowledge that the rest of the director team all had previous experience either as directors or assistant directors for Iconoclast. Despite this, the other co-directors instantly made me feel welcome and supported me during times in which I was unsure of what actions to take. Their extensive knowledge of the publication and willingness to share their wisdom always made me feel comfortable in my role and confident to be my genuine self. A third relationship I built throughout this experience was

with Patrick Mahon, who supervised my directorship. Patrick consistently offered advice specific to any challenges I encountered and provide great suggestions and guidance to overcome these difficulties. He was always extremely present throughout our meetings and maintained a consistent line of communication for any questions or concerns that I may have had. Each of the relationships mentioned were formative in my achievements and growth as an Iconoclast director.

Throughout this directorship, despite being concerned at times regarding my own abilities and skills, I never questioned the value in the experiences the position has brought. One value I found in completing this internship is related to the lack of opportunity that exists within my academic life to participate in creative projects. As an admirer of art, I find that it is often difficult to make time for appreciating art pieces and expressing myself creatively in the midst of the general busyness of school and work. Being a part of Iconoclast this year has been extremely valuable because it has allowed me to block off time for art and to participate in building a final art product that my team and I are proud of, for reasons far beyond academic success. Related to this celebration of personal creativity, another value in completing this internship has been the opportunity in providing a platform for our artistic contributors. When reading through the different students' submissions that we received this year, I was taken aback by the high levels of talent that exist at our school. Sending rejection emails to submissions was difficult because I was compelled to accept almost everyone's work! Further, after the top submissions were selected and each issue was published, I was overcome with emotion in attending each launch party. At the launch parties, members of our team, contributors and other friends were invited to watch virtual live performances and contributors showcasing their pieces. Even though the parties were virtual, the mutual gratitude between the artistic contributors and the Iconoclast

team shined through. Everyone seemed happy with the final issues and expressed this with one another. That communal gratitude and satisfaction with the finished products made the entire publication process worth the work.

Another value in completing this internship has included the ability to apply the skills I have learned through SASAH to real-life situations. Being a SASAH student has helped me thoroughly during this directorship, as the interdisciplinary program has equipped me with knowledge that is catered to collaborative opportunities like Iconoclast. For example, completing many team projects and developing one's verbal and communicative skills are characteristic of SASAH. These skills have enriched my experiences as a co-director a part of a passionate team. Another aspect of SASAH that has provided me with knowledge I have carried onto my directorship has been the multi-faceted teaching and learning that one can find within the program. SASAH prepares its students for all types of situations by consistently exposing us to different ways of learning, and this translates into increased comfortability for new interactions and responsibilities I encountered throughout my directorship. For example, my SASAH classes have provided ample opportunity for expressing myself and communicating through many forms of art and media. Examples of these forms include website creation, graphic design, visual arts and journalism, poetry and videography. Being exposed to many different ways of learning have not only prepared for the prospect of encountering new experiences, but have also made me excited to do so.

I have thoroughly enjoyed being an Iconoclast co-director because I have learned many lessons that will resonate long after it ends. One prominent lesson that I will take from this internship is that creative tools (e.g. creative writing, artistic design and conceptual art) used by students are not merely a secondary form of expression. Rather, these tools play a large role in

allowing young people to express their passions and artistic abilities, as well as the impact and significant voice we have as students to bring awareness to meaningful causes. It was amazing to see the work submitted by our contributors, as well as the graphics created by our team, not only because they were beautiful but also because every piece contained an important message and honest representation of its creator. While I was previously aware of the impact that creative expression has on raising awareness for social issues, playing a role in the publication process amplified my awareness of this impact. For example, the theme of our Fall 2020 issue, (UN)HEARD was inspired by the previous summer's Black Lives Matter protests and the unjust murder of George Floyd. The inspiration for the issue made it important not merely for aesthetic purposes, but for a social justice issue that we could support and raise awareness about in an intentional way. The purpose of (UN)HEARD was to state that BIPOC communities are disproportionately victimized due to systemic race and discrimination, and this statement was made through artistic means. Conversely, our Spring 2021 issue, STARDUST, surrounded themes of existentialism, and the conflict of finding one's purpose with the knowledge that the possibilities are infinite. This purpose of this theme was to reflect many of the thoughts that young people have in their process of entering the world post-grad, as well as some of the existential reflections we have had throughout the pandemic and lockdowns. STARDUST dealt with many concerns that our main audiences have, and this issue was used to show readers that they were not alone in their worries. Thus, this internship has taught me that inherent power lies in creativity, and that young people, rightfully, have so many important things to say through artistic means.

A second lesson that I will take from this internship is the importance of being a collaborative and supportive leader. While leadership may invoke thoughts of power or control

for some, I do not believe that those are the best qualities of a good leader. Instead, I argue good leadership skills entail making sure that one's team feels involved in decision-making and contributions, while also ensuring that they feel supported in doing so. Immediately when I joined the team, the other directors made it clear that they wanted to ensure that the "collective" aspect of Iconoclast was emphasized throughout the year. While Iconoclast does have a director team, the directors alone do not contribute to the publication process; our teams and contributors play a massive role in the success of each issue. Recognizing this, it was important to the other directors and I to ensure that our team members felt supported, but also heard when it came to major collective decisions. For example, we hosted a poll for each of the themes, asking our team to vote on which names that they preferred. As the name of the issue is one of, if not the most, important decision to be made, allowing our team to have a say in this matter was necessary to maintain a collaborative environment. Another example involved the choosing of live performers for each of our launch parties. We asked the entire team for recommendations on and connections to performers, and successfully booked them in this way. A third example involves our communication strategies. For every individual team meeting, we ensured at least one director was present to acknowledge each team's hard work, and also had a team-wide group chat where we welcomed suggestions and feedback. I think that the director team and I did our best in creating this collaborative environment over virtual platforms, and I will definitely implement the leadership values I have learned from this internship into future leadership opportunities.

An internship like this is valuable because it has provided me with an opportunity to connect and work with others outside of an academic bubble and has shown what it could be like to work for a publication post-graduation. I would recommend the completion of an internship

like this one to other SASAH students, and even non-SASAH students, specifically due to the unique experiences that such a role brings. Especially for young women like myself who may have a harder time securing leadership opportunities without connections, this directorship has been extremely valuable in developing my leadership skills further and providing me with experiences I would likely not have had access to without SASAH. Additionally, internships like these are important for undergraduate students because they play a role in developing one's personal and professional interests and influence potential jobs. Being able to contribute to the build of Iconoclast's two released issues this past year has inspired me to continue working on my own artistic craft, and I hope to submit one of my own creations to a publication someday. This directorship has shown me that I would fit in the publication field, but at the very least I know for sure that I want to work in a collaborative and supportive team. Internship opportunities like these are so valuable because they are formative for early work experience and can cause one to identify interests they never previously thought about.

The lessons I have learnt, the connections I have made and the value I have found in completing this Iconoclast directorship have made this such an amazing opportunity. I am grateful to have been chosen for the position of co-director and to have worked on a team filled with such dedicated and talented individuals. I am now moving forward with excitement, as the new knowledge I have gained throughout will undoubtedly play a role in all my endeavors to come.

Addendum

Presentation Script

“Hi everyone, I’m Jade Rozal and welcome to my Experiential Learning Final Presentation. For this part of my presentation, I’ll be talking about my Western Heads East

Remote Internship which took place from July 2020 to September 2020. My team's overarching project involved designing a website for our community partner, MikonoYetu. MikonoYetu is an organization that encourages the empowerment and economic independence of young women and girls residing primarily in East African communities. Our secondary project included overseeing the Western Heads East (WHE) website and making necessary recommendations for future interns to come. In regard to our achievement of these goals, my team and I created the first live website that MikonoYetu has had in eight years. We also reviewed the current WHE website and comprised numerous suggestions and edits into a comprehensive report. For some further partnership information, our community partner was MikonoYetu team, which consisted of Executive Director Maimuna Kanyamala and her trusted executives. We maintained this partnership by communicating through email and WhatsApp to account for international service providers. Another valuable partnership was with our team's WHE mentors, Stephanie, Bob and Maria. This partnership was maintained through weekly meeting and constant communication, through which they offered tons of great advice throughout. For our project results, here's a short video with a quick look at the MikonoYetu site. For my internship takeaways, one of the most valuable lessons I learned was the importance of having an open mind when embarking on any new experience. With never having done website design for a client before, I was definitely nervous about achieving a successful outcome, but I found that I learned so much more from remaining open to feedback and paying attention to the specific needs of the MikonoYetu team. I also learned the uniqueness and inherent value of international partnerships. With attending a Canadian school, I feel that the importance of international partnerships is often underestimated. I now know that there's so much to be learnt from such a partnership. My last takeaway is the need to appreciate not only the end goal, but also the process. Due to the pandemic, there were

definite delays in the work we could complete, but learning the value of patience throughout the process made our outcomes so much more gratifying.”

“For the second part of my presentation, I will now discuss my Iconoclast Collective Directorship. For my role as a co-director, my main responsibility involved coordinating a team of Western students for the publication of two biannual Iconoclast issues. For those of you unfamiliar, Iconoclast is a publication at Western University, born from SASAH. We welcome artistic contributions from Western students and deal with all kinds of topics related to arts, politics and culture. Another major duty as a co-director involved the contribution to the organization and preparation of virtual launch parties for promoting each issue. My secondary tasks consisted of maintaining constant communication with the Iconoclast team and meeting via Zoom when needed, as well as sending emails, reviewing submissions recommending edits. For the partners and mentors involved in this internship, Iconoclast works directly with the AHSC and DC Committee. These organizations are responsible for our budget, reimbursements and faculty-wide promotion of our issues, and we communicate with them through Facebook Messenger, Zoom and Email. My mentor for this internship was Patrick Mahon. We held progress updates through informative Zoom calls, and Patrick was extremely supportive in providing articulated suggestions and guidance for any challenges I encountered. Here’s a short video of a flip-through of Iconoclast’s Fall 2020 issue, entitled (UN)HEARD. In regard to what I have learned and where I have grown in this internship, one of the first things that comes to mind is new communication skills. With the pandemic, I have been forced to function with an improved virtual presence, and while initially difficult, I have definitely improved since the start of my directorship. Secondly, I have also learned that the zone of discomfort is the best space for learning. As I had never previously worked on a publication team before, let alone directed one,

almost everything was new. While this definitely caused some discomfort, I learned so many valuable skills along the way. Lastly, this experience showed me the beauty of a finished collaborative product. Seeing the contributors and the Iconoclast team happy with the finished product of both issues was extremely gratifying, and it was a great feeling simply to have been a part of it. The end... thanks for listening!"