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EL Summative Reflection: Creative Writing Project

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SASAH Experiential Learning

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EL Summative Reflection

After a year of working on my Experiential Learning Project, I can confidently say that my experiences have been not only unique and insightful but have also greatly inspired me for future endeavors. Through an exploration of why I chose my project, my inspiration, interactions with my supervisor, my writing experience, the challenges I faced, and the lessons I learned, hopefully I can effectively relay the importance of this experience while also honestly detailing my performance in executing this project.

Creative writing has always been an outlet that deeply resonated with me. However, I found that throughout my university career, I haven't had much ability to express myself creatively. Last year, when I was thinking of a project to do for my EL, I realized that a creative project would be a great opportunity to practice creative writing. Moreover, I also started thinking about a story idea at the time. I became enamored with science fiction narratives and stories about human consciousness, which led me to work on a story idea involving these ideas. Finally, as someone who greatly enjoys creative writing, publishing my works has been a dream of mine. I saw this opportunity as a chance to not only find my creative voice but become comfortable with outing my work out for public consumption. I felt that even self-publishing could give me insight into the literary world and make me feel more comfortable pursuing publishing avenues in the future. This all came to a head when I developed my novelette as a science-fiction mystery thriller set in society in which people could upload their minds to a

collective consciousness. The story followed an analyst, or cop, as he struggled to solve the murder of a high-profile figure, only to find himself in a complex web of corruption and conspiracies. After conceptualizing this idea, I decided to begin some work on developing this idea into a more concrete story.

After confirming my project, I began work on my novelette during the summer of 2022. In this time, I also met with my supervisor, Aaron Schneider, a professor in the Department of English and Writing Studies. Aaron was an incredibly invaluable supervisor throughout the entire project, as he gave me a lot of insight into the novelette. Not only did he give me an idea of the writing process and provide me with some sources for initial research, he also helped by editing each new chapter I wrote. This allowed me to refine my creative voice and better my work as I continued the project. He also helped me identify certain issues with my writing, like trite wording or inconsistent verb tenses, and rectify these problems. Overall, he was an incredibly helpful supervisor who was instrumental in this project's success. Even early on, before I had written anything, I already got some insight into research.

While my project was in the science fiction genre, I did not engage in much research outside of a few sources. I felt that because I was writing a fictional future with technology that had not been invented yet, I could lean more into soft sci-fi and focus on the societal effects of technology rather than its inner workings. However, I still researched by reading different books and engaging with media that inspired me. One such example was *The Metamorphosis* and *The Trial* by Franz Kafka. Both works dealt with themes of absurdity, nihilism, and most importantly, bureaucracies that were mysterious and all powerful. I wanted my novelette to reflect this strength and mystery, and Kafka's work greatly inspired me to write about this idea. Aaron also recommended *Neuromancer* by William Gibson. This work also looked at sci-fi societies in

which people could upload their minds. This work gave me a lot of insight into the science-fiction genre. I was able to familiarize myself with certain tropes and writing conventions, which helped me write a unique and compelling story. Finally, the filmography of David Lynch helped me create a later idea when I began writing. Lynch, a surrealist, often utilized dreams as a narrative and thematic element. In his films, dreams can be a window into one's soul, desires, beliefs, and even true nature. This also greatly inspired me, as I decided my main character would start having odd dreams throughout the story. These dreams would be used to further his character development, the case, and reveal more about the character without clunky exposition. All this inspiration gave me a rough foundation to build my story.

Although I tried some writing in the summer, I officially began working on my novelette. My general guidelines for the novelette were around 10,000 words, so I ensured that I remained around 2000 words per chapter. This limit, along with six chapters, led to me being only slightly over the word count. Over the course of the year, I had weekly meetings with Aaron, where I would discuss my progress with writing and publishing. I would also receive any feedback on whatever chapter I had currently written and would get a paper copy with edits. This ensured I not only got feedback, but I had a physical copy to see where my work could improve. Moreover, the meetings allowed me to ask Aaron questions about writing and plot elements. One such example was with my character work. I found early on that some of my supporting characters fell into cliches and lacked depth. Talking with Aaron allowed me to better understand how little changes in the work could drastically add characterization. Other than writing, Aaron also helped me with the other aspects of the project. He remained really invested in my work and progress, going so far as to even helping me with my final presentation. All of this insight was

really helpful and made the writing process a lot smoother. Despite this, I still faced some challenges.

Throughout my writing process, I ran into many challenges that were major learning experiences for me. One major example was with outlining. As stated previously, I tried to start my novelette in the summer. I also established a comprehensive outline that detailed the plot, characters, and world. Despite this, I felt unhappy with my work, going so far as to scrap it. I found that my outline, despite its comprehensiveness, only worked to limit my creative freedom. Moreover, by having such a detailed outline, I felt that my writing descended into me simply checking boxes off a page. Therefore, when I began writing in September, I decided to write the first two chapters without an outline. This allowed me to conceptualize the story and give myself more creative freedom and create a clearer structure. By doing this, my outline also benefitted, as I was able to plot out a better story that felt more complete. Another way I was also able to work past this writer's block was to adopt a mentality of not overthinking. When I began, I often found myself dwelling on plot or character issues that led to procrastination. By not focusing on these issues now and instead working on completing my novelette as quickly as possible, I was able to write quicker and avoid writer's block. Also, I was able to dedicate separate time for just editing, which allowed my work to end up more polished. However, the workload was still overwhelming at times.

Before I began, I certainly set up very unreasonable expectations. For example, I thought I would be able to complete my novelette by the end of first semester, which obviously did not happen. I found that my school workload along with writing a novelette was overwhelming, and these unrealistic expectations only made writing harder, as I felt greater pressure and greater repercussions. While I certainly did not lower my expectations, I learned to set reasonable,

smaller goals for myself. For example, instead of planning when I would finish my whole story, I focused on how I could finish each chapter. With these smaller goals, I was able to avoid insurmountable pressure, and create a timeline where I could reasonably finish my work on time and keep up with deadlines. Overall, while there certainly were many issues with the writing process, I also learned a lot, especially about my skills in writing.

During my writing process, I found my biggest struggles were in the beginning. By having these issues when I started, I was able to give myself sufficient time to rectify these errors and improve my writing. Overall, it was interesting to see myself develop a clearer creative voice as I progressed with the novelette. Over the course of this project, I leaned on my writing abilities the most. While I did not get the chance to write creatively throughout university, I do write a lot of essays and formal works. While creative and formal writing are far different, there are some skills that came in handy. Using my analytical skills, I was able to think effectively about the plot and institute changes where necessary, like adopting dreams as a plot device. Moreover, while my project did not directly overlap with the work I have done in SASAH, I felt the creative individualism and analytical intuition that is so common in this program really helped me out. Throughout this project, I learned to trust my creative instinct and build upon those instincts to create a more fleshed out story, which is something I learned with SASAH. Despite these positive experiences, I also faced challenges outside of writing, but they also proved to be a learning experience.

Before I began my project, I thought I would publish my novelette on my own website. However, after talking with Aaron, we decided that an existing website, like Wattpad, would be a better option. I found that a larger platform gave me access to a wider audience to engage with my work. I began publishing on Wattpad around February, when I had already finished most of

my novelette. I found that because readers' attention spans might be shorter, it would be ideal to split up each chapter into two parts that would be published in installments each week. This not only made the work more accessible, but also built-up tension. I published twice a week every Friday and Sunday.

Initially, publishing seemed like a difficult step to make. While writing was often laborious, having to publish my work for the public to see was certainly a frightening prospect, especially since this was the first time I had self-published a creative work. However, I tried to move past that initial anxiety by instead focusing on the short-term. I focused more on the need to fulfill my weekly schedule over whatever reception I received. Also, my interactions on social media also taught me a lot.

I utilized two ways of promoting my work. First, I used social media. Every week, I posted an Instagram story and tweeted every time I published an instalment. This was probably the most effective way of getting readers and was likely my most effective method. It also taught me a lot, as I learned to market myself and feel confident in putting my work out for public consumption. I also tried interacting with the Wattpad community. This included reading other people's stories, commenting, and overall getting a feel for who else was writing on the platform. While I don't think this method was as effective as the first, I still found it valuable. I learned to view art as a collaborative process, and I genuinely found a lot of joy in finding other writers like me and seeing how they approached writing. As of now, my total readership has neared 100, and while I was not sure how publishing would work out, it taught me a lot about promoting myself and getting my work out there. These are lessons I hope to internalize for the future.

Overall, this project has really taught me several things. Not only have I learned to find my own creative voice, I have also learned to write in a manner that is concise and effective. I

have learned about genre convention, how to write layered and complex characters, and how to structure a longer story. Finally, I learned to better prioritize my work and time, as well as promoting myself and being more comfortable in new situations. All these skills have drastically shifted my view on the world, and I will inculcate these lessons.

While I am nearing the end of this project, I still see a future for my novelette. I plan on re-publishing my final draft as a complete work, so that my audience can have a polished, full version of my novelette. Beyond that, I hope to spend more time publishing more creative works. For my Individual Research Project for Aara Suksi's fourth year SASAH class, I chose to write a short story, which I hope to also publish on Wattpad. Beyond self-publishing, however, I also want to look into publishing my novelette into a long form novel. I truly feel that there is still a lot of potential for my story, and given the opportunity to expand upon my works, I would absolutely jump at that opportunity. In addition to publishing, this whole project has truly reinvigorated my passion in writing, and I think writing, in a creative and non-creative setting, is something I would like to pursue. With the skills I have acquired, I would like to try to find a job writing, whether that be for marketing or any other context, I still think my skills would translate. Finally, I think these skills will be essential for my academic career. I plan to take on another year at Western to finish my degree and am also considering law or grad school in the future. The skills I acquired, especially in time management and writing effectively, will be very helpful in elevating my academic work and make me more efficient. I already saw my writing becoming better and quicker over the course of this year as I was working on this project, so I think the EL could provide me with a lot of help. Overall, this project was special to me, as it not only gave me the opportunity to express myself creatively, it also taught me things about myself and my work ethic I was not expecting to learn.

As I look back on the entirety of this project, I am left with somewhat conflicting emotions. While I am certainly proud of all the work I've done, I also think there were clear areas for improvement. Throughout this project, I tried to maintain professionalism throughout, especially with Aaron. However, with the issues with deadlines and high expectations, I often found myself missing meetings or not being able to finish chapters, especially earlier on in the project. While I did find a strategy that improved these issues, I still think I could have been a more professional supervisee. In addition, I also feel I neglected the reflection and assignment aspect of this project. While I focused most of my time on writing the novelette, anything else reading the EL fell by the wayside and I did not prioritize it as much. However, even with these drawbacks, I still think I was an overall creative and enthusiastic force during this project, and while I had some issues with deadlines, I made it my utmost priority to respect the time and efforts of Aaron and everyone who provided me with guidance on this project. I also made sure that I accepted all feedback with grace and enthusiasm, as I not only greatly respected the people who critiqued me, but I also relished every opportunity to better myself as a writer and a worker.

When I began this project, I had only a vague idea of a story and small expectations of getting the chance to write creatively instead of an essay. However, over the course of a year, this novelette has truly been a transformative experience that has taught me so much. From improving my writing to finding self-confidence, this experience not only showed my creative vice, but also showed me the value of my voice. I learned to trust my instincts and believe in my work. While it may sound cliché, this project truly allowed me to find myself. I am excited for the aftermath of this project and the opportunities it brings.