

Kathryn Kavanagh

Community, Environment, and Planning

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Here I sit, pondering the last four years of my life and how formative my educational experience has been at the University of Washington. It has certainly been quite the journey, with unbelievable growth, unexpected challenges, unprecedented discovery and exploration--culminating in a deepened, more enlightened mind, more compassionate heart, entrepreneurial spirit, and momentum and drive to blaze the paths ahead.

My freshman year started out as a jolt. A fish out of water, in more water than I had ever been in before as a classic California transplant, I found the University of Washington to be literally and figuratively a cold and uninviting place. To my surprise, I had no idea that the UW was a commuter school, and struggled socially to find my footing. I tried out for several artistic clubs such as improv, chorale, and a cappella groups--and was rejected from all of them. I found myself studying business as a freshman direct admit. I found difficulty in connecting with both people and class material, and was under a deep and unsettling sadness that I did not know what I wanted to do with my education or "calling."

I was fortunate enough to stumble upon Community, Environment, and Planning at an environmental tabling fair in Red Square, where I was immediately attracted to a small red button with a cool logo on it. I was asked if I wanted to hear more about what the table and program was about, and I politely declined and said I just wanted the button. However, I did keep the attached slip of paper pinned to my desk bulletin board, just in case. Luckily when I was searching for classes for the winter of my freshman year I chose to look up whatever in the world CEP could mean, and I found myself intrigued by the course description.

So I signed up, and took the class. There, in that class, my mind was exposed to new knowledge I had no idea existed--that connected the spheres of environment, community, and urban spaces. I knew this was something interesting that sounded like it could be an apt fit for me, but my better senses made me think business was a more logical degree to

complete. Despite this mental struggle, I explored topics CEP had to offer in my own hometown, finding an internship at a community urban farm in San Jose, California.

My sophomore year was further continuance of business and my unhappiness with the program. However, I took interesting and inspiring classes through the Program on the Environment, like Natural History of the Puget Sound Region. I learned about birds and plants and geomorphology, and in the process of learning outside the classroom I developed a newfound knowledge and affinity for verdure and life.

It was by chance and circumstance (fate?) that I stumbled into a CEP open house that I had marked on my calendar. I was sure that CEP was a nice thought, but definitely not the right move for me. Though as luck would have it, I spoke with a lavender-haired neighbor from my hometown of Almaden, San Jose, California. The uncanny coincidence and ability of this young woman to confidently announce her 21 credits of the quarter, and dual degree--with preference for CEP--sold me on the idea that I could in fact balance two degrees.

Interestingly enough, I had previously felt daunted by the amount of credits and possibility of pursuing both degrees, so I had figured I could just substitute CEP with an environmental studies minor. This changed when I was told of how CEP was just *that* much better of a program--go figure.

When I think back to my sophomore year, it was emotionally challenging. I was still figuring out if I even liked UW or the people I had met. I still felt like I did not have a community or group of people I truly connected with. Additionally, I was going through my own personal identity crisis as a young woman trying to discover what more there was to life, love, and fulfillment. I recall feeling emotionally distraught and challenged as I had broken up with my long-term high school boyfriend and adjusted to life away from what I knew in that relationship. This was my "free birding" phase, where I ended up believing that that was actually a relationship I belonged in. The end of the impending summer would prove this wrong.

Despite some challenges, my second year was academically interesting--I took environmental studies classes outside in Ravenna, at the UW farm, with nutrition classes, but I was still looking for ways to tie all this knowledge together. My interest in food

further developed as I sought out a job in a prominent bakery back home over the summer, where I got a foot in the door in the fine dining scene. I was exposed to the best bread and pastries of my life, and inspired by the most talented baker I had ever met. The seed for love of gluten had germinated.

To adapt to the impending credit overwhelm and further balance my distaste for business, I applied to some study abroad programs. Interestingly enough, I got into the competitive Foster exchange to go to Denmark my junior year, but with an added degree in CEP, this made that option not possible. Instead, I applied to some exploration seminars, and was accepted to the environmental studies department's Peru exploration seminar. I embarked in the early fall to study tropical ecology and biodiversity, conservation, and sustainability in the Amazon and Andes region of Peru. This trip changed my life and opened my eyes to the wonders of the natural world in a way I'd never thought possible. We conducted research at various biological stations only accessible to researchers in the heart of the jungle, and had the privilege to see a vast variety of wildlife--from tapirs and monkeys, to scarlet macaws and a spectrum of birds, to caiman and jaguars. I felt the deepest appreciation for being alive I'd ever felt, and my worldview was expanded to see more of the interconnectivity of all and the peril we are facing as a global society. This prompted me to think of what I could do to articulate these messages and perspectives.

The fall of junior year was a formative one. Coming back from Peru with fresh eyes and knowledge, I absorbed the philosophy class and new CEP community with openness, though perhaps not as much as I could have. I joined PESE and had a lot of ideas for potential events, though it was interesting to see how much of that did not manifest.

I became point for PESE winter quarter, and felt like I had done the major wrong by not really catalyzing anything. I didn't have much direction or guidance from the previous points, so I did not quite know what to do, where to begin, or how to effectively engage people. This was a challenge for me, and I felt like an ineffective leader and that it was my fault that CEP was not the community I wanted it to be.

Spring of junior year I took several food studies classes, and another ecology hiking class, in addition to entrepreneurial marketing. This was a quarter where I felt all my interests were

aligning and starting to make something important, stringing theories together. I felt inspired and motivated to have a really interesting senior project, and at this point I thought it might be a community cookbook with tools and tips and tricks for learning about sustainable food systems and incorporating knowledge and fun recipes into lifestyles. (This is probably my next project.)

I spent the summer of 2017 in Seattle working at Seawolf bakery, biking around, dealing with my terrible roommates who caused me emotional and bodily anxiety (you are a product of your environment, what that looks like makes all the difference), exploring nature and cultivating my physical strength, and reading lots of books on feminism, yoga, and philosophy & spirituality. I was gearing up for Denmark, and hoping to focus on becoming my best self. I had also ended another relationship at this point--one that had been very challenging in some ways, but expansive for my imagination, consciousness, and critical thought. With the end of this chapter of personal life, roommates, and general feelings of staleness with some other friends, I was ready to go to Denmark and read a suitcase full of books.

I arrived in Copenhagen at the end of August, when the summer sun still lingered in parks and where biking was flat and fashionable. Studying at Copenhagen Business School, I was exposed to just business classes for the semester, which was an interesting and challenging experience. I brought a lot of books with me, and I had a lot of free time to read. I was committed to doing the research to make my senior project the most effective it could be. I also supplemented my business classes with in-depth yoga theory classes at a strange yoga center in Copenhagen. Lots of stories here.

I practically imposed a solitude upon myself in Denmark. I figured a circle of friends would eventually reveal themselves--and it did, it just took some time. I actually had a significant amount of loneliness, melancholy, and general existential crises. Despite this, I loved the people I vibed with, though generally I find it a little difficult to genuinely connect with business students. An abridged version of Denmark includes lots of biking, lots of bread and pastries at the many wonderful bakeries of Denmark, reading tons of books, doing yoga everyday and getting enough sleep (and glowing because of it,) being a sad poet girl who fell in love with many a stranger (but did not talk to them out of shyness,) New Nordic

Cuisine, trying to get a noma chef to fall in love with me (and 70% succeeding), and probably meeting enough characters abroad and experiencing many a strange thing to write some children's novels, books, fairy tales, etc. Denmark was dreamland, absolutely.

I also got the chance to do some solo traveling around various European capital cities. This was extremely formative. Challenging at times, daunting at others--I experienced a range of emotions and am much stronger as a person because of having to rely on myself to take care of myself and be quick on my feet. I also had the chance to see SO much art and beauty, meet wonderful people, eat wonderful food, and generally just experience life in a profound way. So many stories here, but that can be saved for later...

When I came back to America in the winter I was really excited to come back to CEP and not take solely business classes that I felt were important and informative, but generally lacking soul. I missed CEP a lot when i was away. So when I came back I tried really hard to cultivate community, because from what I heard it was kind of lacking it when during the fall (in some opinions.)

Winter was challenging--academically, emotionally, physically. I consistently hosted things at my house and tried to bring people together. This proved somewhat difficult. People are conditionally responsive, if you can tap into their self-interest. Of course, this is not the case for everyone and there are some super duper gems in CEP whom I absolutely adore. Though the larger community needs some work. This could benefit from internal leadership. However, I've found persistency and incentives work. Also people can match your energy, and people respond to genuine words of affirmation and acknowledgement. CEPeople are lovely, you just have to get through to them.

In the process of me trying very hard, there was a delicate, powerful beauty in the community that revealed itself. I think this cultivation and emergence is one of the most special things I've ever had the pleasure of being a part of.

On the topic of leadership, I took Dorothy Bullitt's professional leadership class, where I learned a lot about myself and my communication styles when it comes to leadership. I further expanded upon my emotional intelligence, which I cultivated abroad heavily

through solitude and observation (despite “solitude,” I think I got better at talking with people because I would spend so much time alone and then just be SO chatty whenever I would interact with people.) I also took my first class in the American Indian Studies department, where I took a class on decolonization strategies for resistance and resurgence. This was incredibly thought-provoking and provided the antithesis to business that I needed to learn. I learned so much in this class.

I took 22 credits in the winter. I also did a 30-day yoga challenge. At the end of the quarter (which felt like a lifetime), I felt strong, accomplished, mentally acute, sleep deprived. Still, finding balance is difficult and on-going. My senior project was ever-unfolding, and tangential because of all the interdisciplinary fields I had consulted.

Alas, we are at spring! What a quarter it’s been. I’ve been a busy busy buzzing bee. I took an indigenous food sovereignty class in the AIS department, and I think that was the missing puzzle piece for my senior project and general education on food systems. This being said, the POE and CEP departments would tremendously benefit from integrating indigenous ways of knowing into the curriculum (*cough* E-in-CEP *cough*)

I extended myself in so many directions I don’t even know what I was thinking. I was actually thinking day-by-day and “wow, I need to take a nap!” I appreciated consul from Chris Campbell. I appreciated everyone throughout the process of my senior project telling me I couldn’t do things. I think I ended up doing some pretty cool things.

Of the spring quarter festivities I did:

- Earth Day at Red Square Feast for the Senses prototype
- Humble Feast planning and recipe development
 - An economist named Thor said the cake recipe I designed was the best cake he’s ever eaten (it was vegan!) and that it just might be able to change the hearts and the minds of the people...
- FEAST FOR THE SENSES
- Started a podcast on holistic healing
- Art installation for friend’s capstone
- Pop-up Picnic Park

- Joined an improv troupe and am now officially funny
- Too many meetings--did this make me feel important? Maybe
- Thought about writing a satire of my life as the bachelorette
 - This would be amusing, it is amusing. Modern dating is a mess. I am also a hopeless romantic. I am the best person to make fun of myself.
 - I will write this
- Probably other things that I might find objectively notable but am too tired to currently recall
 - Definitely lots of other things

Most notably, I executed my senior project in a way that surprised myself. Surprised by my mental capacity and ever-developing ability to use language (sometimes I read my writing and 1) forget I wrote that, or 2) find it actually compelling to my own self.) Surprised by the outcome, the turnout, the response & feedback, the HELP and COMMUNITY that emerged and the beauty that derived out of those experiences. Hands down the thing I'm most proud of doing in my young life, besides all the solo travel/finessing--though that was also learned experience incorporated into my personal and intellectual development that made this all possible. I did a thing, and it was a big thing. All along the way people doubted my abilities and I think I did what I knew I was capable of doing all along. I know it can be even better (from time, funding, feedback, learning,) as I see this as ongoing work with ostensible importance and value (at the cost of my sanity at times, but here we are! My character is way strong because of it.)

Wow this quarter has been absolutely PACKED. Another lifetime within a lifetime. I cannot believe this academic year began in August in Denmark and now I am about to graduate from Foster later today. Holy heck. I have grown an unbelievable amount in the last four years, but especially in this last year. When I think about it all, I am so proud of myself--I don't know why I am often so hesitant to acknowledge this fact, just as I may hesitate to call myself an "artist" or a "poet." Though I'm definitely a business woman.

I have done so much, when I think about it I feel so accomplished and like I have so much momentum. I want to keep this, I want to keep expanding upon my knowledge and keep learning, I want to follow my passions where they may lead me--who knows where it

might! There is so much more to write and reflect on and this is encouraging me to start that blog I've been wanting to write, record that podcast I've been wanting to do, trade in my guitar for one that's better suited for me, bake America the bread and pastries it doesn't know it wants, and just do the darn thing (whatever that may be!) Next step is strategizing what the best way to further synthesize all this information and life experience to keep up this momentum and further self-actualize.

I am so grateful to CEP for allowing me the opportunity to discover so many disciplines. Knowledge is a gift, knowledge is power. I could not have learned nearly as much with just a business degree, and I would certainly not have the community and support system that CEP provides. I truly love CEP, from the bottom of my heart. I have faith and vision in the mission, it truly is what you make of it. An education must be actively, passionately explored if one wants to learn as much as one can--and one can learn A LOT in a very short amount of time, it'll be dense, saturated, nuanced. With openness to synchronicity, experience, and imagination, I think there is no limit, there are no bounds, to what can become of the future.