

CEP Reflection Essay

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“I want to create an innovative, repeatable process of identifying and sharing a country’s unique cultural identity so that they can maximize their tourism potential thus increasing understanding among people. I believe CEP can guide me in learning how to help countries identify, preserve and share their culture and environment.

Sincerely, Wen-Yen Pai”

Those are the ending sentences in my CEP application video, and two years later, I’m still committed to the ambitious idea of creating “an innovative, repeatable process... thus increasing understanding among people.” CEP was the path I chose to help me realize that dream, and after presenting my senior project, I think I’m somehow closer to that dream.

As a transfer student from Highline College, an International student from Taiwan, and a multipotentialite, I struggled to find a major that I wanted to pursue for my professional career. I’m interested in many things, from tourism, cultural preservation, transportation, urban planning, geography, communications, etc. Looking at the statements and experiences described on CEP’s website, I was inspired and surprised about how unique this program is for students and to the world.

Looking back on the 2 years I spent in CEP, I truly believe I chose the right and smart path for my college education. I experienced many downs in my CEP career, but the ups just

made the downs worthwhile. I saw myself glowing when I presented my project at Senior Project Night. I also saw myself being weak and depressed in the dark corner struggling to thrive in the same way as the other talented and confident members of my cohort were. Because of my personality, it takes a long time for me to get close with people and reveal my true identity. After spending 2 years in CEP, I'm glad I feel like a real CEPster now because I love this community so much that I can feel the love and connection between the staff, seniors, juniors, Gould, and I.

Tracing back to my junior year in CEP, I had a hard time in fall quarter. CEP 301 was not a class that had I expected CEP would have. The critical thinking and amount of reading in 301 really made my first quarter at UW not so enjoyable. However, I decided to become an officer in a Taiwanese club called Taiwanese Youth Alliance of Pacific Northwest (TYAPN), which is an academic-based Taiwanese club at UW. The Taiwanese community made my first quarter less lonely and miserable. I joined CEC in my first quarter in CEP, however unlike TYAPN, I didn't feel connected in the group, because I couldn't relate to most of the topics other committee members were discussing, because I'm not from Seattle and U.S., there were so many issues and terms I was not familiar with. But I still tried to participate in volunteering events and being present at the Houseless panel to learn more about the issues Seattle is facing right now. During winter and spring quarter in my junior year, PÉSE brought me closer to the CEP community by hosting events like Chinese New Year party and Senior Project Night. In CEP 302 and 303, the group projects allowed me to get to know more about my cohort and taught me realistic knowledge I can utilize in my career.

The summer of 2017 was the most rewarding summer vacation I had in my college career, and I accomplished many things. I applied to be an intern for a Taiwanese company called *Bank of Culture*, and it turned out they hired me as a videographer to help them work on a video project. *Bank of Culture* is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving Taiwan's dying culture and traditions through social media and many other methods. I'm lucky that I got to be the coordinator that conducted the video project of a century-old traditional market in my city. I'm very proud of the video I created and I enjoyed the time working with *Bank of Culture* and my friends said that made the video look professional. The most rewarding part of the experience is that I got to interview the vendors in the market, which was essentially the community engagement that we had talked about in CEP, and I experienced the significance of hearing stories from the community members and learning what the community means to them and how history shaped their lives. I can see so much potential for the market to thrive if more community engagement processes are implemented. The connections I made with the vendors make that market even more special to me, even though I have been there countless times throughout my life.

My internship at Crooked Trails gave me the opportunity to go to Peru to help them film some footage for their travel programs. I spent the first 10 days traveling around the country alone, which was an eye-opening experience that inspired me to focus on host-traveler interactions in traveling for my senior project. Unfortunately, I got really sick from altitude sickness and a serious cold so I was not able to follow the itinerary that I had planned with Crooked Trails. Even though I didn't get to experience the community experiences or Machu Picchu, I learned a big lesson which is to take my health as priority, making the right decision to give up everything and seek help to take care of my body.

Back in Seattle and being healthy again, I was ready to take on the challenges in my senior year at college. Besides CEP's senior project, I took on the challenge of being the president of the Taiwanese club(TYAPN). During Fall quarter and Winter quarter of my senior year, I experienced the darkest stage of my life. I had no passion, I lost my appetite, and I had no confidence. The stress of being the club president gave me my first panic attack in my whole life. I had to deal with the conflicts between officers while trying to fix the broken system of the club, and I was overwhelmed with my senior project and taking 20 credits of courses. I was broken.

For winter break, I decided to take my host mother to Taiwan as a case study for my senior project. I thought the trip will be a transformational trip that would make me feel alive again. However, the trip did not meet my expectations and we were physically and mentally tired throughout the whole trip. Coming back to reality in Seattle, I struggled with the failure of the Taiwan trip case study, and I had my second panic attack in my life. I also started worrying about the future of the club, wondering if I'm going to be the final president that closes the club.

After talking to my mentors and teachers, I started to find other methods for my senior project and I started to interview people about their travel experiences. The first few interviews were difficult, because I lost my communication skills from suffering depression. As time went by as I talked to more people, the broken pieces of my soul started to come back. I started to figure out the significance of my project and that I was actually passionate about it. I realized that it was a project that could influence others to increase their

understanding among people through traveling. Spring break was the real transition of my struggled life while I was able to relax and spend time editing some travel vlogs from last summer. I got to spend a lot of time doing nothing and to enjoy being a human.

As the sun came out and spring quarter started, I was ready and excited to do my senior project. I enjoyed every class I took, from the internship class with Caitlin, the Eco-Capitalism class with Isabelle, to the senior project class with Chris and my lovely cohort. I still remember the night on March 30th that I went to Robin's improv show. I laughed so hard at the show and I had an ice cream cone after the show. I was smiling when I fell asleep that night. Starting that day, I felt guilty sometimes when I smiled or felt happy, because I was in depression for 5 months and I forgot how to smile and live my life. I was having a "hard" time learning I could be the happy person that I used to be. Day by day in my last quarter at UW, I felt happier and happier, I started to spread laughter and happiness to the people around me, which was the way I used to be and what I was passionate about.

I became more active in the CEP community then. I spent more time in Gould getting to know more about other CEPsters and I took on many tasks in the major. I joined ARC and found another family there, as I was involved and I was happy. Also, I found out there was a team who were willing to take over the club next year which was a huge relief and allowed me to put more attention on my senior project.

The creation of my Senior Project was stressful, but I enjoyed the journey to Senior Project Night as I had the support from many CEPsters, my mentors, and my family. Senior Project Night was indescribable, and I am still impressed with my performance and the great

feedback from the audience and reviewers. After I gave the best presentation in my college career, I was suffering from a mysterious stomach ache for a while, which was a feeling I've never felt before. After Senior Project Night, my love toward the CEPeople became stronger and stronger, and I'm both sad and excited about graduation. It is the ending point of my CEP career, but my starting point of my professional career.

Community, Environment & Planning is a unique major where every CEPster get to create their own experience. There was one point during my period of depression where I felt that I failed in CEP, and that I was going to let my family down by choosing this major. Now as I'm graduating, I think I learned so much from the two years that I spent here, not only about myself but also about how to make the world a better place. Even though CEP still has many things that can be improved, it has not disappointed me but rather has surprised me on how much it has brought to my life. This is a major for the multipotentialites. This is the major for the people who want to change the world but don't know how to start. This is the major built by students. Thank you CEP for letting me find a home here in Seattle.