

REFLECTIVE ESSAY

As my time at Bridgewater College comes to a close, this reflective essay offers the perfect opportunity to do just that - reflect. With the over twenty courses I've taken over my three and a half years, there is much to consider while preparing for my transition to grad school. It's easy to think about what went well or what I might do differently if I could do it all again, but the really important things to focus on are the experiences that helped me grow intellectually and as a person in general. Through the challenges I face in and out of the classroom, Bridgewater College, including the faculty, administration, and fellow students has created a clear path toward success.

Personalized Educational Program

Majoring in Communication Studies here at Bridgewater College means taking an incredibly wide range of subjects. I usually liken my major to an umbrella, because so many things can be included under its reach. I entered as a freshman with a lot of college credit under my belt, having taken and passed several Advanced Placement courses in high school, so I had some time to figure out what I wanted to major in. I dabbled in Political Science, thinking I could be a lawyer, as well as English, dreaming of becoming a screenwriter, during my first few years, but settled on Communication because it was the home of all the film courses. I'm happier with my choice now as a senior about to graduate than I thought I ever would be.

Though there is much leeway within the guidelines set by the department on how students should fulfill the requirements, there are some courses every comm student dreads simply on reputation. Two of the required courses are Research Methods and the capstone course, Applied Communication Theory. Communication Theory serves many of the same purposes as PDP 450 does; it is attempting to prepare students for their post graduation life through reflection on what they've learned over the past four years.

In Communication Research methods, taught by Dr. Michele Strano, each student chooses their own quantitative and qualitative study to construct and implement after learning how to conduct each kind. I chose to create a study on popular political satire, such as *Late Night with Seth Meyers* and the (still airing at the time) *Colbert Report* (<https://wp.bridgewater.edu/kehoo4/artifacts-2/artifacts/>). I was curious to see if the amount of political satire viewed would be related to political efficacy, voting habits, and gender. Having learned how to analyse the p and s values, I put together a survey with a few other students looking into similar topics and asked my facebook friends to participate. Unfortunately, none of my hypotheses were supported. It was frustrating to see what I thought was a good idea be in no way “proven” by my survey. At the end of the day, I did a poor job of creating questions and relied on people taking clicking on my survey out of the goodness of their hearts. Since I had followed the steps correctly, I still got an okay grade, but it was a blow to my esteem as a scholar. Though my study went horribly, I gained some insight on how those in the communication field gather and analyze data and I realized thinking critically in order to create my hypotheses and then to interpret my results was challenging and interesting to me. Outside of class, I ended up doing more research on the critical theory paradigm and how it is employed by communication scholars. Pure quantitative research may not come naturally to me, but getting a glimpse into that field was useful, especially since we also conducted qualitative research (wp.bridgewater.edu/kehoo4/artifacts-2/qualitative-study-report), which I found much more rewarding. Not only was it fun to interview my friends, but qualitative research allows for much more room for interpretation on the researcher’s part. Not having to boil everything down to pure numerical values was in some ways less satisfying, but it also gave me the opportunity to follow where the conversations led me, instead being stuck in the pre-determined rut of quantitative design. I’ve accepted a spot at Southern Illinois University that comes with a graduate assistantship position. That job could be as a research assistant, so Bridgewater’s inclusion of research methods into their majors is incredibly useful for students like me.

Talking to my roommates about their capstone courses has made me extremely grateful for the approach with which the Communication department takes to their version. I feel incredibly prepared to enter the job market after taking the class with Dr. Melanie Laliker, having learned useful skills like how to dress properly for an interview or how to best prepare to respond to questions in interviews. One of the department's goals is to have the best public speakers on campus, so naturally our semester-long final project culminated with a presentation (wp.bridgewater.edu/kehoo4/artifacts-2/comm-400-final-presentation). This presentation was not simply about our deliverable product, but about the process it had take to arrive at the destination.

Though the project did not turn even close to how I wanted it to, I learned a lot about myself in the process, and being forced to reflect on it in order to share it in my presentation made me take stock. I determined that the areas where I had fallen the shortest were time management and planning. Procrastination has always been a special talent of mine, but it had never backfired so badly as it had with this project, and it was even more obvious than usual, since I had to share my failures with the whole class in a professional presentation. During the presentation, I was incredibly negative toward myself and my efforts, apologizing throughout. I felt terrible about making the class sit through what I thought was complete rubbish. One of the main points of feedback I got from Dr. Laliker once it was all said and done was to not be so pessimistic.

I encountered similar issues with procrastination with the internship I did for credit with Bridgewater's media relations department (Stephen Hockman). I would never finish editing my videos unless he set a hard deadline for me, which we figured out over the course of the semester. I'm not going to get over this problem overnight, but I've got another two years in an academic environment to figure it out during my masters. It is no failure of the school's that it took me too long to confront my issues with time management in particular, it was only my willingness to sacrifice sleep for three years that has gotten me this far and kept me on the Dean's List.

Before I ever got to Bridgewater, I applied to the Flory Fellows Honors program. Being apart of a community of other nerds that love learning from day one has been a boon for me. I am currently roommates with one of the friends I made during our honors section of the honors PDP course with Dr. Bryan Duncan. Honors upgrading courses at times was fun, but was always challenging. I would try and gear my extra projects or presentations toward things I was passionate about, which usually ended up being film. Pushing myself just that little extra bit in just six courses led me to do some of the best work of my academic career. In addition to the upgrades, I also got to take some honors sections of regular courses, like the gen-ed sociology course, and an upper level english course. I got to know the Fellows students from different years, who I would not have encountered in my freshman or senior year honors courses. The discussion was always stimulating and enjoyable. Having an extra medal on when I walk across the stage in May is great, but I'm much more thankful for the relationships the program has fostered and the opportunities gained.

My decision to focus on studying communication has led me to at least my most immediate next step, which I am eternally grateful for in so many ways. I owe all of the Communication professors so much; they've prepared me for success in so many different ways.

Engaging Diverse Perspectives

Combining the forced sampling from other departments required by Bridgewater's general education program and my dabbling throughout the humanities, I encountered many ideas in conflict with my own. One of the courses I took my first year that had the biggest impact on me was Introduction to Political Philosophy with Dr. James Josefson. I was one of the youngest students taking it that semester, and definitely the most willing to prove myself. Dr. Josefson's policy was that you could turn in a paper as many times as it took to get it right, and to get it right was to really understand what you were writing about. One paper that I wrote that I worked particularly hard on was an essay attempting to apply Aristotle's ideas of the ideal democracy and citizen to 21st century Americans

wp.bridgewater.edu/kehoo4/artifacts-2/aristotle-and-the). Synthesizing what a philosopher thought of our current interpretation of democracy and how we participate in it was not something that a Comm major would usually have to think about, let alone discuss or write about. This might only seem diverse from an academic perspective, but I also took this class with students I had never interacted with previously. It brought me out of my little bubble over in Memorial.

I started doing radio (BC Spark) and writing for the school paper (Veritas) my freshman year, and during my junior year, the two organizations merged into BC Voice and I'm now the Editor in Chief of the newspaper. I feel like I've earned my position at the head of the paper, and I've certainly grown into it over the academic year. As the head of the paper, I assign articles to the "staff," but that's only the beginning of the process, the end of which is choosing what goes on the paper. I encounter a wealth of perspectives in the form of editorials and letters to the editor every time we publish. I could leave it to someone else to edit and look over, but I know it's important to make sure my writers feel heard. We've published things I certainly don't agree with, but they deserve a voice on campus.

During my semester abroad (which I will talk more about later), I got involved in the Debate Society at Bradford and took part in some lively discussions where I became the stand-in for the USA. Everyone else would yell at me, and, don't get me wrong, they were all well-informed and rational in their loud critique of my country and (especially) its foreign policy. I was happy to serve as a tension reliever. I learned more about the crappy things America has done internationally in fifteen minutes than I had in a week of U.S. History class in high school. I've never purposefully isolated myself from anti-american sentiment, but engaging with students with a completely different view of my home was jarring at times.

From an outside perspective, it may appear that I wasted my time in my courses that I didn't need to take for my general education or major requirements, but I wouldn't trade my broadened horizons for an earlier graduation date in a million years. I didn't come to Bridgewater College because I preferred a liberal arts approach to my secondary education, or because I even knew what that was, but I know I'm better for it.

Citizenship/ Ethics & Community Responsibility

Through the Academic Citizenship program and the annual Big Question here at BC, each student is challenged to apply what they're learning to the issues outside of our tiny campus. The questions through my four years here have made me and my classmates think about what kind of impact we want to have on the world. It may start as a discussion about what should change or where do we go from here in class that evolves into activism and involvement in the larger political sphere. In order to fight for ideas I care about, I must be able to back them up with reasons, and in order to know where my logic has holes, my ideas must be challenged. Writing in support of my ideas is much more difficult than criticizing others'. In the Ethics and Identities course I took, taught by Dr. Laura Yordy, each and every class was a discussion about the reading we had done for homework. Our final paper was putting these skills we had practiced to paper (<https://wp.bridgewater.edu/kehoo4/artifacts-2/ethics-identity-final-paper>). I had to support my interpretations of 80s films as feminisms texts. I enjoyed writing the paper a lot, but I didn't end up getting the best grade on it, since I misunderstood the prompt. Upon reflection of the course after I had complete it, I thought more about the ethics I applied in my own life. What were the rules that I set for myself, what things would I absolutely not do? I never had to put them into words, but simply thinking about them was productive. Setting those core beliefs now is important as I move forward in life, where they will be challenged. I can't be deciding in the moment whether or not a certain decision crosses my personal lines or not.

A big part of the traditional college experience that came true for me is the process of un-sheltering that occurred mostly during my first and second years. Part of that process was being exposed to ideas that had been previously hidden from me, by my parents or otherwise. One of those un-sheltering incidents happened in my gen-ed biology course when I was asked to give a presentation of stem-cell research (<https://wp.bridgewater.edu/kehoo4/artifacts-2/stem-cell-research-presentation/>). I wasn't asked to take a

stance on it, but having to get up in front of my class and talk about something that had been previously taboo to me was a strange, yet freeing experience. This wasn't the first or only time that my worldview was challenged, but it stood out to me then and it still does. Moving away from home is only the first and physical step of the un-sheltering process. As individuals, it's our responsibility to expose ourselves to and engage with ideas we may not agree with. Refusing to do so creates divisions like the one we face now in our country. I wrote in a recent editor's note (https://wp.bridgewater.edu/kehoo4/?page_id=90&preview=true) about free speech and the importance of talking to people that disagree with you. We are at an impasse and to start to get back on the right track, knowledge should never be withheld from those who seek it, especially when willing minds are hard to come by.

Global Citizenship & Intercultural Competencies

In addition to the survey of subjects I did course in, many of the clubs I joined also encouraged me to engage in with different viewpoints. My position on the Interfaith Board began as being the representative of the Catholic religion, but it has become much more of a learning experience. We put together this survey (<https://wp.bridgewater.edu/kehoo4/artifacts-2/interfaith-poll-questions/>) my junior year in an attempt to gauge student perception of the religious, or lack-thereof, atmosphere on campus. Getting the board to follow through on most of our ideas can be difficult, especially when we can't find times to meet, but having discussions that transcend our different ideologies and move toward a higher goal of creating an inclusive climate at a Brethren affiliated college was inspiring.

America's national identity has been redefined by the presidential election this past November. In one of the articles I read for my Ethics and Identities class, we discussed the history of our national identity (<https://wp.bridgewater.edu/kehoo4/artifacts-2/hogan-reflection/>), and while I may go off on a bit of a tangent in my response, the key issue that it leads me to now is, as our Big Question asks, where do we go from here?

I spent the spring semester of my junior year in Bradford, England. While I was there, I tried to stay connected and involved with the goings-on at Bridgewater, even though I was thousands of miles away, so I wrote an article for *Veritas* on the differences between Bradford and Bridgewater (wp.bridgewater.edu/kehoo4/artifacts-2/bridgewater-vs-bradford/). My list of contrasts may seem to focus on the trivial aspects of college life, but many of them are evidence of much larger trends of similarities, as well as differences. I came back to the states right before the Brexit referendum, but my phone was flooded with texts when I woke up to the BBC update that the country had voted to leave the EU. The exact same thing happened right after our nation elected Donald J. Trump in November. The former were mostly jokes about deportation from my fellow international students, but the latter and more recent were genuine messages of concern for me and my family's safety. The rise of populism internationally was the most concerning product of 2016 and watching it unfold in the United States was a rare experience.

Spending a semester abroad in a country where they speak the same language and share much of the same culture may seem like the safe bet, but in some ways it might have been more difficult than a completely foreign land. I definitely didn't sound like I fit in, but I could, and wanted to, look like I did. In Bradford, there is a very large East Asian population, but the city seemed to have moved past the race riots that had occurred several decades before. A lot of the students at my school were Muslim, but they didn't mix well socially, since most of the after-school activities involved the consumption, at times copious amounts, of alcohol. Attempting to understand the mores of a slightly different set of societal norms is challenging when there are so many aspects to consider.

Experiential or Service Learning

This past semester I had the opportunity to intern with Stephen Hockman, the Web Manager in Bridgewater College's media department ([/wp.bridgewater.edu/kehoo4/artifacts-2/internship-final-paper](http://wp.bridgewater.edu/kehoo4/artifacts-2/internship-final-paper)). I had gotten to know him helping out with some videography stuff in years past and arranged the internship

to be for credit through the school. I helped Stephen make numerous videos to put on social media during my several months as his assistant. My role was not defined, so at times it was frustrating to try and create a job for myself. Over time, I became more adept at editing and took on more responsibility. The last video we made was a spotlight on Charlotte McIntyre, who is an intern with Special Collections, and the preservation work she does in the basement of the library (wp.bridgewater.edu/kehoo4/artifacts-2/special-collections-vid). Having clips like this that I filmed and edited by myself is great to have for my personal portfolio, especially if I decide to pursue a career in editing or social media management.

This practical opportunity not only taught me specific necessary skills, but also taught me how to organize and prioritize tasks and projects. Stephen and I would usually have multiple videos in the works at one time, so we had to be on top of our schedules so that a project didn't slip through the cracks. This internship was one of my first experiences with a "real" job (not a movie theater or restaurant). In the first few weeks, I started to figure out why professors assign so many group projects. As frustrating as they may be, it doesn't compare to not being able to do your job because someone keeps forgetting to cooperate.

Without the many influencing aspects of Bridgewater, I may still be floating aimlessly, adrift in my own indecision about my future. My professors, friends, and experiences here have guided me to eventually figure out that graduate school was what I wanted to do next. After that, I'm not so sure, but I am happy with my choice to spend the next two years of my life studying media theory at Southern Illinois University as part of a fully funded graduate program. I get to go to school and study what I love for free! Without Bridgewater, I wouldn't be here.