

High Rent | Low Bar

This past four years in higher education has been a fast four years. I think back to the beginning of my time in college and it feels like yesterday. A strange yesterday though, where the person from back then isn't the same person I am today.

I started college at Seattle Central College in 2014 with the faintest hope of taking education through to a bachelor's degree. At that point things in my life weren't going well and I didn't expect much of myself, but I was in school because I knew it was my last chance to do something with myself. I'd been in Seattle for just over a year at that time and was prompted to go back to school over shock from rapidly rising rents.

The first two classes I took were in spring quarter of 2014, that's a full quarter prior to what would be considered my freshman year. The bar for entry at Seattle Central is low, but I still had trouble meeting the minimum qualifications for math preparedness. With some strategic planning, I was able to begin early enough that I could build credits and take other classes simultaneously. I was surprised to find that I'm actually quite strong in the math department. If not for a low barrier for entry, I never would have been able to situate myself with small doses of developmental stress.

I learned about CEP in 2013 while I was browsing the University of Washington College of Built Environments webpage. It stood out as an attainable goal, primarily because it was an undergrad program in a school dominated by graduate and PhD

dominated majors. As I moved through my required course work at Seattle Central, I was never very certain that I would make the leap to the university level. The first time I ever felt proud of myself was when the golden letter arrived in my mailbox, telling me that I'd been accepted to study at the University. I cried. I had just received validation for everything I was putting myself through (financial hardship, continued distance from my family, brain stuff).

The first year of CEP was particularly tough for me. I did not understand (and to a degree, I still don't understand) the familial aspect of the major. I can say that I never wanted or cared to be anyone's friend at the UW. I came to the UW for academic rigor, not an artificial family. Never in all my time contemplating the CEP major, have I taken the Community aspect of the name to mean that I needed to build a new community with my peers.

Perhaps the reason for my difficulty in the first year could be attributed to my natural introverted nature. The effort it takes for me to listen to someone talk about personal details is by far more difficult for me than the math work I'd been whizzing through at Seattle Central. At the end of fall quarter 2016, I sincerely considered dropping the major.

In Winter 2017 I was asked to join David Blum for a planning practicum that promised real-life work experience with a client. That class, without a doubt, gave me

respect for the major that I hadn't had the quarter prior. I excelled. For the first time, I was doing what I came to school to do: drawing lines on maps and making people listen to my ideas. The class was so good that I took it three times.

The first time in planning practicum I worked with the city of Seattle to begin developing conceptual station area plans for a future infill station along the Link Light Rail Lynnwood line at 130th St. just south of the Seattle Border with Shoreline. The second time the learning curve was less steep but I was able to navigate the timeline building and scoping process much better. The third time in the practicum I chose to focus on my project management skills. For the first time I was orchestrating seamless projects for my teammates (which in a way probably prevents them from experiencing the steep learning curve that I had to acclimate to).

By the second year in CEP I was doing much better. I knew the people, so it wasn't as much work to be around them and I was starting to develop a realistic sense of the things I wanted to do with myself in the future. At fall retreat 2017 things just began to fall into place. I was working on a very audacious project for CEP 460 Planning in Context that was a combination of wit mixed with data. Our group was tasked with helping the city of Tacoma meet the goals of their 2025 comprehensive plan by determining the data points they should collect in order to create success metrics. The summer prior I had started an internship that's now turned into full-time work, and I was fit, which helps with thinking and moving.

Winter quarter of 2018 was another tough quarter for me. Because Autumn quarter had been so smooth, I asked for more hours at work and took more credits. For most of the time, I was working 25 hours per week while trying to pull off 18 credits at school. That didn't go so well for me, I almost failed every class and became unproductive at work. For the first time, my self confidence was being built up just as quickly falling back in on me. The workload was excruciating. Lesson learned: don't bite off more than you can chew.

Spring quarter has been the only time that I've been able to genuinely invest quality time into my senior project. After a terrible Winter quarter with too much workload, I think Spring quarter has offered the right mix. I've been able to take the Digital Design Practicum and do pretty well there. I've been able to build a better working relationship with Megan since she's helping with the development of the layout for my senior project which will be updated prior to graduation. Work asked me to get paid more and work more hours, so that's good.

Considering the gradual advancements I've made, I feel like I'm satisfied. The friends that I've reluctantly collected through CEP have turned out to be a good thing, they're good people (for the most part). I have had my eye on graduation as if there will be a feeling of arrival, but the developments I've made have come so gradually that I wouldn't notice if it didn't have a ceremony attached to it. The transition out of college

and into work is happening fairly naturally for me, I'm ready for it. I have to say, none of this would have ever happened for me if Seattle Central hadn't been there offering second chances to people. So in a round about way, I'm thankful for high rent.