

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

HERDWORK STORIES

Stories of Community, Opportunity, and the Humanities



ABOUT HERDWORK



The HerdWork Humanities Internship Program at Marshall University is funded by a grant from the Mellon Foundation. It provides students a chance to gain professional experience, make a meaningful impact in Appalachian communities, and explore career paths that align with their passions.

This publication tells the stories of some of those interns and mentors, and the impact HerdWork Program has made on their lives and in their communities.

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HUNTINGTON MUSEUM OF ART



Chris Wilson and Mollie Hatfield

Interview by Emma Wyre

“Art is for everybody. It is HMA’s goal to make it accessible for the community”

Mollie Hatfield

“The networking side of it is just unreal ... I never had those opportunities before.”

Chris Wilson

In the fall semester of 2025, Chris Wilson interned at the Huntington Museum of Art. Mollie Hatfield, Museum Store Manager and Director of Guest Services, mentored him, helping him navigate life working at the Museum. The HerdWork program made this partnership possible. And even though Chris’s tasks may seem like typical intern work—answering phone calls, handling email correspondence, running the gift shop and cash register, making social media posts—everyone involved came out changed for it: Chris, Mollie, and even the Huntington Museum of Art itself.

About the Huntington Museum of Art

The Huntington Museum of Art is more than a museum or art gallery. Situated on fifty-two acres of land, open to the public for free from 6AM to 10PM, 365 days per year, the grounds include hiking trails and a nature camp for kids in the summertime. The Museum also offers art classes and art programs for the community through its program, called Museum Making Connections.



By acquiring and displaying different types of art from all over the world, the Huntington Museum of Art serves the community by bringing art to people from all walks of life—because art makes a difference, and art is for everyone.

**Want to learn more about the Huntington Museum of Art?
Visit www.hmoa.org/**

Chris and Mollie

Chris grew up in a small town called Crumpler in McDowell County, West Virginia. For most of his childhood, his father mined coal for U.S. Steel while his mother worked at a local bank. His childhood shaped his vision of what work was, but his internship at the Huntington Museum of Art reshaped that vision. He said, “The job itself expanded my vision of what types of jobs are out there, things I could potentially see myself doing.”

Chris first came to Huntington and enrolled at Marshall University, because he knew a degree from Marshall would provide opportunities for his education, career, and even his health—even if he didn’t know exactly what he wanted to do with his life. And it did provide opportunities. Chris said, “I knew I wanted to go back to school, and I couldn’t really ask for anything better than Marshall.”

Mollie is a native of Ona, West Virginia, about twenty minutes east of Huntington, where she lives now. “I have been fortunate enough to call the beautiful region of Appalachia home my entire life,” she said.

While her background is in retail management, her personal artistic passions and deep roots in the Huntington area brought her to the Huntington Museum of Art. Mollie loves the arts in many forms—live music, interior design, painting, vintage glass—and her position with

the museum gave her a platform to use her professional skills to showcase local art to the community of Huntington and beyond.

Chris and Mollie might seem like an unlikely mentor-mentee pair, particularly at an art museum. Mollie studied Music Education at Marshall, while Chris started off as an International Business student before ending up in Communications. But the partnership didn’t just work—it thrived.



Museum Store



HMA t-shirt

Opportunity

Before HerdWork, Mollie had never received the opportunity to host an intern. But when Dr. Rich Jones approached HMA with information about HerdWork, many of the staff members were quick to climb on board. “I am thankful that HerdWork staff makes the initial connection of interns to sites. We are all so busy, so having the interested interns come directly to us makes the process of vetting candidates incredibly streamlined,” said Mollie.

Even then, there was competition for placements. “I had requested to interview two people,” Mollie said, “but they were placed before we were able to interview them. At that point, I didn’t think I was going to be matched with an intern that semester

But, as fate would have it, a colleague sent her Chris’s information.

“I worked commercial retail at various places for about ten years and I eventually I became the hiring manager. So I’ve done a lot of interviews in my day. I am quick to know when somebody will potentially be a great fit for you, or when someone maybe is not the best fit for you. And Chris, immediately—I knew he would fit right in,” Mollie said.

And Chris rose to the occasion. He had opportunities to apply not just customer service skills, but to work

with the community on projects and do research. He had hands-on opportunities to develop professional skills through interacting with the public audiences that frequent the Museum. This included visitors, business owners, and even government officials.

“I learned a ton while I was there,” Chris said. “The things that I remember taking away are pieces that I researched for local artists, a lot of glass making; Blenko is a very big thing at the Museum Store. I got to learn a lot about Blenko, I got to take photographs during exhibit set ups, I got to ask them questions.”

Talking to local artists was a routine part of his work. To best represent their work, he had to talk to them. This meant getting in touch with them through social media, phone calls, emails—whatever contact the artist preferred.

The questions he asked were often simple, like: Where do you do your art? What inspired you to do art? Do you have a signature style?

But the simple questions need to be asked, to make art accessible.

Mollie takes this part of her work seriously. She said, “We are bridging a gap that has been long standing: that people have thought that art is for specific people. I grew up thinking art museums were for

wealthy people, and I did not grow up wealthy. So of course I didn't try to go into an art museum. But then I realized that you don't have to look at a piece of art on the wall and be moved by it. You can just like the colors, or you can just like the movement in it, or you can just really like the name of the artist. Anything about that, that gives you joy. It doesn't have to be that deep."

Through his HerdWork internship, Chris was able to contribute to that work.

Connection

Networking and gaining connections within the Huntington community was a big part of Chris's time at the Huntington Museum of Art, as well. Chris considered fostering relationships with community to be an essential part of his job, ensuring a positive experience for both artists and visitors to the Museum, helping to create a space where they wanted to come back. His internship experience gave him the opportunity to collaborate and create through partnerships with other organizations and leaders in the Huntington area.



A picture of downtown Huntington from the city's Instagram page.

"The networking side of it is just unreal," he said. "I never had those opportunities before. Being given that opportunity by HerdWork ... I was just floored at the opportunities I had with people who would normally be so far outside my social circle and so far outside my reach that it was basically like trying to speak to the president."

Chris recalled several projects done in collaboration with other organizations in the area. One example was an exhibition the Museum had in its parking lot with Blenko Glass, a company based in Milton, West Virginia, that is very popular at museum stores. Chris learned a lot about this local company—in business since 1893—and took pictures featuring their glass blowing



A Blenko suncatcher featuring HMA's logo, available at the HMA store.

There were less likely collaborations, as well. Chris had particularly fond memories of a collaboration between the Huntington Museum of Art and the Huntington Tri-State Airport, which was an exercise in teamwork and coordination that resulted in an exhibit about the museum

showcasing local artists at the airport. He helped set up the display, took pictures, and announced the exhibit on social media. Now, all airport visitors can see the display from the Museum, which helps advertise where they are and what they have to offer.

And the connections weren't just external. Chris enjoyed working with the other employees at the Huntington Museum of Art. He called their group one big family and still appreciates everything they did for him while he was there.

Responsibility

A successful internship experience, however, requires both the intern and the mentor to take on new responsibilities. To make sure the internship went smoothly, and they both got the most out of the experience, Mollie had to do a lot of initial planning: what did the Museum need from the intern, and what will the intern need from the Museum?

Mollie partnered with others at the Museum to plan everything from job duties, interview dates, meetings, email correspondence, and start dates. "In the beginning," she said, "we sat down together and really discussed what we need from an extra set of hands."

And just as importantly, they asked, "What do we think would make the

most difference in this person's life given their degree?"

The internship wasn't about simply temporarily filling a need for labor at the Museum. At its core, it was about making a difference in the community, through offering the intern an opportunity to develop skills on-the-job by working with local non-profits. Designing the internship and working with Chris, Mollie took this responsibility seriously. Not only did she wish to give him the proper tools to excel at his work at HMA, it was also her goal to teach him skills that he could apply elsewhere—in his future career and in life.



A picture taken inside the HMA store.

"In order to write all these posts and captions, all this language about the Museum, you must learn about the Museum too. What better way to do that than to put him in a position that's going to give him those tools? We also have the Museum Store. You're learning accounting and bookkeeping, scheduling, customer service, the base lines of a POS system, how to operate all of this."

Chris responded in kind. His work wasn't just about fulfilling his job duties and doing what Mollie expected. He considered building a thriving environment for the next intern to be part of his responsibilities. He wanted to make sure people at the Museum had a positive view of not just him, but the HerdWork program in general. He wanted people to ask—"Hey, are we going to have another intern? I really liked that last guy. Let's get some more of those people."

He said he is a true believer that you get out of internships, what you put into them. As the first person from the HerdWork program to work at the Museum, he was setting the stage for whoever comes after him—and he hopes that he is just the first of many. He knows what the program did for him and considered it his responsibility to help build a solid foundation, so the Museum can do it again for someone else.

Growth

Chris felt anxiety and hesitation going into the internship. He was nervous about starting something new in a world unknown to him—but his co-workers and team members provided encouragement and guidance that helped him through the journey.

She was there for him to bounce ideas off of and ask questions like, "Does this work?", "What can we change here?", and "How can we set this up in a different way to be more aesthetically pleasing or to go with the motif that was being set up?"

Much like Chris, Mollie believes that internships can be powerful experiences. Internships, done right, can make a difference in people's lives. They help them discover who they are as an individual and what their goals and aspirations are. Furthermore, they connect interns with the option for non-profit work, providing an opportunity to learn how non-profits function and connect in the community. And the internship was a growth opportunity for Mollie too—her first chance to step into a mentor roll.

She considers Chris to be an example, that HerdWork interns can go out into the community and spread the word about what the Huntington Museum of Art has to offer—and more concretely, what the Museum has offered them.

Mollie hopes that the HerdWork program will grow so it would be open to more students, so others can have the opportunity to experience life working at a non-profit. If she had an opportunity to step into a role in a nonprofit as a college student and learn more about what non-profits offer and do, she would have loved it.

For Chris, the internship ultimately expanded his vision of what he was capable of and what types of jobs are out there. He discovered things that he could potentially see himself doing at some point in my life, if given the opportunity.

The internship was an opportunity to grow—not just for Chris, but for Mollie and the Museum as well. The Museum benefited from Chris's work, yes, but Chris put a piece of himself into the organization in a way that matters for the community and any future interns that come after. As for Mollie, she realized just how impactful the process could be for everyone involved.

"You can't get this from working at the mall," she said.

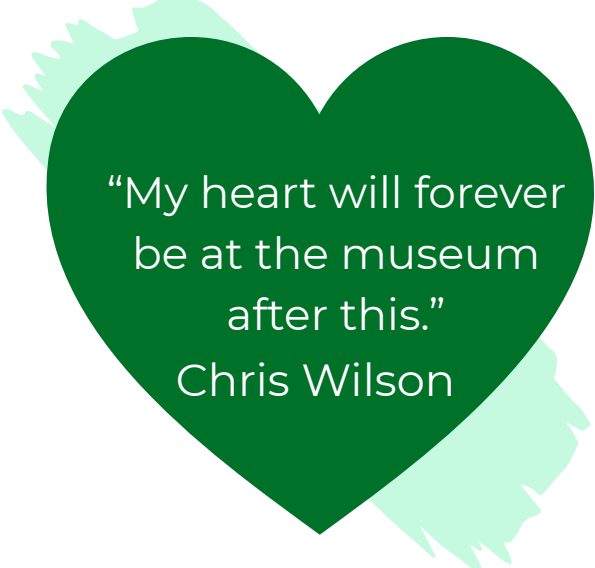
Conclusion

Their internship concluded on November 14, 2025.

"It was a very bittersweet day," Chris said. "I wasn't expecting to be part of the family the way I ended up being. Everything about that was a completely novel experience to me. It's the first place I've ever worked at where I felt comfortable."

About HerdWork, Chris said, "It was the luckiest thing in the world. It was life changing."

And that is a connection that matters in a lasting way, leaving its mark on the people and the organization—so much so that Chris is planning to marry his fiancé at the Huntington Museum of Art in October 2026!



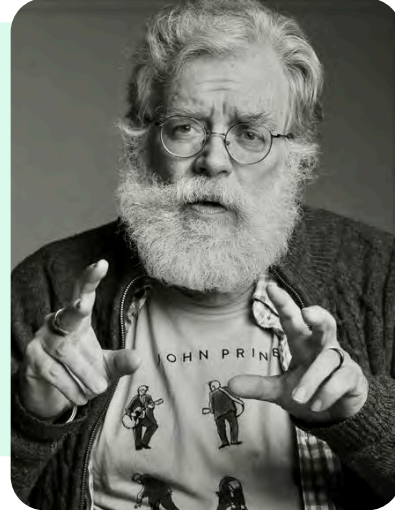
"My heart will forever
be at the museum
after this."
Chris Wilson



Emma Wyre, a West Virginia native, is a graduate student in the Graduate Humanities Program at Marshall University. She is passionate about learning more about her home state and the lives and experiences of fellow Appalachians.

With a background in Outdoor Recreation Management, Emma is deeply committed to fostering community and meaningful human connection, values that continue to shape her academic and personal pursuits.

STEP BY STEP



Harper Aulick and Michael Tierney

Interview by Kathaleen KuhnBook

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***“Our goal is to be present
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Michael Tierney

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***“It's important to be able to share specific stories of
successful West Virginian artists. A lot of people don't
necessarily think of West Virginia as a place you can
have a creative career, which is not true.”***

Harper Aulick

About Step By Step

Step By Step was founded in 1988 in response to thirteen-year-old girl sharing her experience surviving and escaping sexual abuse in a story titled, “You Don’t Have to Live that Way.” Her story was a catalyst for other youth in foster care to tell their stories about abuse, teen pressure, disability, and the challenge for West Virginia youth to “hold on to home.” Their stories were eventually shared as original theater productions with regional, state, and national impact.

In 1993, one parent shared, “The problem around here is that they don’t teach you how to dream.”

Since 1995, Step By Step has shifted its focus to working with communities to support children, prevent and heal trauma, and work toward a world where children can thrive at home.

As part of its work, Step by Step reclaimed an abandoned four classroom elementary school and opened the Big Ugly Community Center, which served as the launch pad for its community development programs.

Community and storytelling are part of Step By Step’s DNA.



Want to learn more about Step By Step?
Visit www.stepbystepwv.org/

Harper and Michael

In Fall 2025, Harper Aulick was an undergraduate senior at Marshall University majoring in creative writing and literary studies with minors in history, theater, and women and gender studies. She grew up in Wheeling, West Virginia, with a deep interest in the performing arts. She realized early on that, while there are many talented performers in the region, there is often a disconnect between youth and community-based theater resources for those wanting to get started in the arts.



A picture of the Big Ugly Community Center

The HerdWork Humanities Internship program connected her to Step By Step, Inc., where she was mentored by the long-time Executive Director and current Special Projects Coordinator, Michael Tierney. Michael has worked in the nonprofit space in West Virginia for nearly fifty years.

Under his leadership, Step By Step grew and thrived. The organization became a pioneer in the nonprofit sector by adapting to community

needs and now serves over 1,000 West Virginia children and families. Step By Step has a long history of sponsoring integrated educational experiences and internships such as those funded by HerdWork.

Michael proved an experienced and able mentor for Harper—but the exchange was not one-sided. Harper was creative and thought broadly about community theater. Ultimately, her work helped introduce him to community theater traditions and groups he had never heard of.

Working with Step By Step appealed to Harper because of the breadth and diversity of its projects and programming—the organization is involved with many different initiatives across the state.

"Our goal is to be present to whatever needs kids, youth, and families show up with in underserved Appalachian communities. So we have three, really four community centers, and they provide support to people with kids from zero to eighteen. And then we also have food banks, clothing rooms, and other services that serve the whole community," explained Michael.

And as the Family Library Curriculum Development intern based at the Big Ugly Community Center near Harts, West Virginia, Harper was able to research existing services, identify a resource gap, and ultimately work towards filling that gap through work she was personally invested in.

Community

Ultimately, community is at the heart of Step By Step and its programming—and Harper got to work extensively with people in the local and regional performing arts community.

As part of her work, Harper created shared digital spaces on Substack for online community connection and storytelling. While the Substack was originally designed for the theater resource guide she developed as part of her internship, she hopes it can become a platform for more general community storytelling at Step By Step. Providing community members with physical and digital spaces to express themselves helps foster more open communication and understanding.

“Transparency and accountability are very important for maintaining the health of a community,” she said.

But community isn't just about providing platforms and infrastructure—it is about human connection.

Harper experienced this firsthand through interviewing.

“The biggest highlight in the internship was the interviewing I got to do,” Harper said. “That really wasn't something I had done before but I

was really, really well prepared because Michael talked a lot about the oral histories Step By Step does.”

“Interviewing definitely sparked my interest in doing more interviews and that kind of storytelling. I'm a creative writing major, and I specifically write creative non-fiction. So I'm already in that world, but I had never really gotten to do that specific form of writing, and getting to do it really highlighted how much impact interviews can have and why it's important to be able to share specific stories of successful West Virginian artists,” Harper said.

Throughout her internship, Harper was able to interview notable West Virginia performing artists. One example was professional storyteller

Adam Booth, based in West Virginia. “His storytelling is something I've been following for a while. So that was very cool, to actually get to speak with him and hear about his artistic process and his artistic journey.



Harper reflected, “A lot of people don't necessarily think of West Virginia as a place you can have a creative career, which is not true. It's just there are a lot less resources to get there.”

Creation

With Michael's guidance, Harper was able to combine her knowledge and love of the arts into an impactful community resource; her internship culminated in the creation of a theater resource and curriculum guide for kindergarten through twelfth grade. The guide includes histories of West Virginia performance venues, interviews with influential West Virginians in the performing arts, classroom activity guides, and more.

"I was looking into what resources were already available—what sort of educational theater organizations there were, how accessible those are to kids in the region. Things might exist, but they could be an hour away or super expensive."

To create the guide, Harper had to research and integrate existing resources. "I also looked into different plays or different educational books about theater, that could be compiled as a curriculum packet to teach your kid about theater, or have a program where you know you're doing a unit on theater."

Her guide became a valuable resource for youth who want to learn more about performing arts and get involved. It can be used in many different ways by the communities served by Step By Step—in ways that link back to its origins in 1988, with the story, "You Don't Have to Live That Way."

"We talked a lot about trauma-informed storytelling," Harper said. "Unfortunately that's something the organization is having to deal with a lot—people who have gone through a lot of things. I feel like I have a better understanding of how to approach conversations like that, and how to form stories about trauma."



New Possibilities

"A lot of my expectations going into this were that I was sort of like the classic intern—I'm to be running and getting people's coffee, and I'm going to have all these menial tasks to do. But that was not the case. I had so much freedom with what I got to do. I really got to guide a lot of my own internship, which was so awesome, and I'm so happy that I got to work with Michael."

She made the best use of her time during the week by researching and drafting her curriculum guide source materials remotely and joining Michael at the SBS's administrative center in Charleston or at the Big Ugly SBS Community Center once a week or so to review her work. While in person, she gained hands-on experience working with other non-profit professionals, volunteers, kids, and families. This included learning about the inner workings of successful nonprofits, including grant writing and administration.

"We would look into grant opportunities together, talk over potential different projects that Step By Step might be working on in the future. I got to help brainstorm a lot of stuff with that. We talked about potentially finding grants for performing artists to come to the Big Ugly Community Center and do something with their programs, and we would also do a little bit of organizational work in the Big Ugly Community Center Family Library down there."

The hybrid nature of her internship helped Harper balance her responsibilities and make the most of her internship experience. The hybrid format also helped Michael see new value in remote collaboration:

"I think it's helped us think more broadly about how to do peer learning. We do not have to wait for people to have the funds and the time in their schedules to, you know, schlep from hours away to sit down face to face. This internship has helped me think more about how we can expand our impact and not necessarily have to drive all over the place to do that."

Her internship with Step By Step helped Harper see new opportunities and ways of thinking—perhaps even changing her career path. "I think I want to pursue, maybe even professionally, interviewing with arts advocacy in mind."

Michael has high hopes for the future of HerdWork. He hopes the program can expand to include summer internships.

"That full-time immersion is the best way to kind of change your life," said Michael.

He also sees great potential for a program that functions using small grants to allow students to access funds to create their own program in the nonprofit sector—not unlike the

theater resource guide Harper developed during her internship.

"I think it'd be very valuable for the student, and I think it would also make the faculty mentors and the nonprofit mentors a little more courageous about saying we can bridge the gap between our institutions and really create something that neither of us could do on our own," Michael noted.

Conclusion

Michael believes strongly in HerdWork's mission and efforts. "It was delightful to see that there are so many people in Marshall that really believe in this process. Hats off for the program, and hats off to Marshall."

As for Harper, she said, "HerdWork is great. I highly recommend it to everybody."

"The stipend from HerdWork made it possible for me to do a 20-hour-a-week internship on top of getting all my classwork done, a part-time job, and have a life. Without that financial support, something was going to fall through the cracks. So it was very nice to get the stipend and college credit for doing this internship."

Harper was so pleased with her experience, that she is interning with the West Virginia Creative Network as their Creative Connective Storyteller Intern.

"It's great," she said. "It's a great opportunity. The stipends are awesome. The people are awesome. The organizations are awesome. Everything is awesome, and I love getting to do these internships."

While Harper credits the internship with helping her gain experience that improved her skills and confidence in ways that will make her more competitive for post-graduation opportunities, HerdWork also provided the basis for imparting critical non-profit knowledge to the next generation of leaders.

"We've always tried to pass on what we've learned from what we're doing," Michael said.



Kathaleen KuhnBook, a southern Ohio native, just completed her master's degree in humanities and certificate in Appalachian Studies in the Graduate Humanities Program at Marshall University. She and her husband, Wesley, own and operate Cabin Creek Farm, and she also owns KB Media, a photography and videography business. In her free time, she volunteers with local 4-H and FFA youth development programs.

VOICES OF WEST VIRGINIA



Alyson Long and Kate Long

Interview by Clara Jones

“Voices of West Virginia aims to give West Virginians an easy way to connect with one great West Virginia writer after another.”

Kate Long

“You can be successful and be from a small town and do whatever you want, as long as you’re passionate about it.”

Alyson Long

About Voices of West Virginia

Voices of West Virginia is a nonprofit digital educational initiative dedicated to showcasing West Virginian authors, preserving regional literary culture, and challenging stereotypes that depict Appalachia as intellectually or artistically limited. Originally based on a project produced by National Public Radio, it evolved into an online platform. The organization provides interviews, educational materials, and expanded projects such as “Five More Voices” to make regional literary excellence accessible to schools, libraries, and the broader public. Its mission is both educational and cultural: to provide role models, inspire future writers, and encourage West Virginians to see themselves as participants in a vibrant literary tradition

Founder Kate Long says, “. . . it's not only a way to make people feel proud and inspired, it's also a way to torpedo stereotypes and certainly if people read the writers on Voices of West Virginia and our companion website, Five More Voices, it's very hard for them to say that West Virginia is a backwater of illiteracy.”

Voices of West Virginia was created to give West Virginians a way to connect with the many West Virginia writers who are celebrated outside West Virginia, but little known inside the state, although West Virginia writers have won the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award and almost every top award in writing.



**Want to learn more about Voices of West Virginia or the
Five More Voices Project?**

Visit www.voicesofwv.org and www.fivemorevoices.com

Kate and Alyson

Kate Long is not new to having interns. Having been a journalist and writing coach for several years before entering the nonprofit field, she has had many students in her life, almost all of them Appalachian. A lifelong West Virginian from a small town in Fayette County, with 35 years of experience in journalism and writing education, Kate positions herself not simply as an employer, but as a mentor invested in developing interns' practical skills, confidence, and long-term futures. Her guidance emphasizes clear communication, storytelling, design literacy, and professional development, reflecting her belief that interns should leave with transferable abilities rather than merely completed tasks.

"Storytelling is a time-honored West Virginian tradition. [But] our best writers are better-known outside the state. This state celebrates champion pumpkins, but not champion writers," says Kate.

Voices of West Virginia started as an effort to change that.

Alyson Long, a senior double major in English and Japanese, represents the kind of humanities student HerdWork was designed to support: talented, ambitious, and initially uncertain about the accessibility of professional opportunities within her field.

Like Kate, Alyson is a lifelong West Virginian and advocate for the power of West Virginia's authors. Entering the internship partly because it was paid and unusually available to humanities students, Alyson quickly evolved from a student seeking experience into a creative contributor whose work materially shaped the organization's outreach. Through poster design, copyediting, social media, grant research, and conference participation, she developed stronger writing, design, and public speaking skills while also deepening her understanding of her home state and her own professional potential.

Cultural Identity

Both Alyson and Kate express disappointment at how few West Virginians know that West Virginia has produced hundreds of nationally-recognized writers. Kate emphasizes that this lack of information, growing up, is what spurred her to help start the Voices of West Virginia project. It is a tangible way for West Virginians to interact with art about their culture by members of the culture. Kate aims to create a tool that connects West Virginians with writer role models, thereby diminishing the power of negative stereotypes

It's not about ignoring the stereotype, Kate says, but making sure that there are easily accessible materials to prove them wrong. If there are no role models to show students that they can write, or opportunities for them to discover new paths into the future, students will begin to believe that such pursuits hold no value to them.

Alyson echoes this sentiment by explaining that by having Voices as a resource, young people see more opportunities to enrich the state by staying, instead of falling prey to the rhetoric that one must leave Appalachia if they're to be successful and express themselves. Voices of West Virginia is a response to this identity crisis that so many young West Virginians go through when attempting to find themselves, as well as filling a need that has long since gone ignored.

Alyson's double major in English and Japanese has given her opportunities to study abroad and see how the world beyond the United States interprets West Virginia. Outside of the song *Country Roads*, she explains, not many foreigners are aware of the reputation the state holds. Through her work at Voices and with HerdWork, she's been given tools to show the best side of West Virginia and Appalachia to the world. It helped her understand the idea of audience, and the magnitude of importance that Voices actually has.

Alyson's experience demonstrates that this work is not abstract; it actively reshaped how she imagined her future and her relationship to her home state.



Mentorship

Kate's approach is deeply developmental, focusing on helping interns build confidence, practical communication skills, and creative expertise. Alyson consistently describes Kate less as a distant supervisor and more as a trusted guide. This model of mentorship highlights the internship's broader purpose: not simply labor production, but the cultivation of emerging professionals.

During Alyson's first semester with Voices of West Virginia, she was granted the "Humanities in Practice" award for her work on the promotional material for the website. This was a monumental achievement for her and spurred her passion for Voices even more.

To her, Kate was instrumental in assisting with that important moment. Without having HerdWork and Kate's mentorship, Alyson's passion for creating promotional material and powerful skill for editing would've gone unnurtured, something she couldn't imagine today.

Receiving the award was definitely the highlight of the previous semester's events; Alyson mentions that her parents seeing her get recognized for her work at Marshall was deeply important to her, and even her advisor, Sabrina Jones,

sought them out at the event to emphasize how much Alyson has contributed.

The type of mentorship Kate focuses her attention on is highly individualized, but meant to mold the student into both a professional and a storyteller.

Kate's other interns at Voices provide a variety of different talents to fill in —

aspects such as website design, and developing partnerships with potential contributors to the website. Each of the interns are free to rely on one another and seek advice, and none of them receive tasks beyond their level of expertise.



Kate's recommendations to HerdWork hinge on the importance of mentorship in forming the lives of young professionals – the hard work goes both ways. When discussing what could be done to support the interns, Kate said perhaps more attention could be paid to interviewing the mentors.

“So you luck out if you get a good mentor, but you don't know necessarily if you get somebody who's not interested in the well-being of the interns and just wants to get labor. And I think it is real important to these students that they be able to have a mentor that's interested in their well-being . . . I don't know how you could, but it's almost like you should have to apply to be a mentor,” says Kate.



Reciprocity

An important aspect of the nonprofit is the talent Kate brings to the table. It's not as simple as having an intern come in to work, having them flit around the office, and then leaving without a complete idea of what the workforce is like.

“My aim with the interns isn't just to get as much work out of them as possible.”

Kate stresses the importance of having a relationship with her interns beyond giving them tasks to do. She's not just trying to squeeze the last bit of work from them before they go into the workforce—she's molding the way they view themselves, their state, and their work.

One of the prime examples of Kate trusting Alyson in her capacity as an intern at Voices was assigning her a project that would move Voices of

West Virginia off of the website and into the classroom. Alyson and Kate worked together on what the posters should look like and how they should be worded, then Alyson created the posters. This process involved reviewing interviews, selecting representative quotations, and iterating designs in collaboration with Kate.

The posters debuted at the 49th annual Appalachian Studies Association conference that took place at Marshall University.

Alyson recalls the writing process as challenging and incredibly rewarding, an experience that changed the foundations of how she would write.

“So I would listen and read the transcript of the interviews and I would try to highlight the quotes I thought stood out most. Then I would come up with a design. Kate would look at it, I would tweak it. Then we came up with all the fourteen posters.”

Afterwards, she, Kate and the other interns brainstormed what would be best for distribution in schools, libraries, and educational centers across the state.

Alyson says working with Kate on the project was monumental to how she understood herself. Kate says working with Alyson has broadened her understanding of what accessibility can look like in the digital age.

Most of their meetings were virtual, with a few in-person writing workshops meant to hone Alyson's skills and bounce ideas off one another.

Since Kate's work keeps her mobile, she was worried about how this would work, but both student and mentor found that the online aspect heightened their experience.

Conclusion

Kate credits the HerdWork program with making internships possible to organizations with despite limited funding, noting that access to interns is critical for nonprofit sustainability.

The funds paid to Voices are reinvested into the program, she said, allowing Voices to pay additional writers and expand projects like Five More Voices, an online publication attached to Voices of West Virginia that celebrates West Virginian authors of many different stripes; from budding teenage poets to internationally-known writers.

With Alyson's growing skill in advertisement and confidence in working with social media, she would contribute to Five More Voices as the site's copy editor, and help maintain different aspects of Voices's social media to promote their work.

Alyson's work with Voices shows that HerdWork offers more than an internship placement. It helps develop future participants in an

ecosystem of mentorship, cultural advocacy, and professional development. Through practical skill-building and regional literary activism, the partnership fosters both individual transformation and broader cultural change. At its core, this work insists that West Virginia's stories matter, that its writers deserve visibility, and that young Appalachians can imagine futures rooted not in escape from place, but in pride, creativity, and contribution.



Clara Jones is a Humanities graduate student at Marshall University. She whiles away the hours hunched over notebooks, constructing elaborate narratives to titillate and thrill the masses, and lording over her small army of cats.

About the Editor

Brooke Hypes serves as the Program Assistant for the Graduate Humanities Program at Marshall University. She earned a Master of Arts in Humanities and a Graduate Certificate in Appalachian Studies from Marshall in 2023 and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Planning, Governance, and Globalization at Virginia Tech. Outside of work and school, she enjoys reading, writing, and chasing after her mischievous poodle, Casper.



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