

GRADUATION NARRATIVE
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The Human Experience Through Nature, Mind, & Body

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The complexities of the human mind, body, and overall experience have always intrigued me. I wonder about what people are thinking, why they are acting the way they are, and how their life has brought them to their current thoughts and emotions. How do our biological systems affect these thoughts? Is the self just a personality or is it more than that? Is it static or dynamic? Are we impacted more by our brain chemistry, or other people, or even the planets? These are questions that I am immensely interested in and have spent much of my four years in Johnston exploring, so that I can ultimately have a more holistic view of what it means to be human and experience this complex world. I gained so much from all of my classes and in this narrative I will attempt to highlight some of the overarching themes and connections between them that evolved through both classroom and field experience.

Much of my growth as a scholar came from exploring different perspectives on human mental processes. This came from courses such as Neuroscience, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, Self in Society, and Counseling. In Neuroscience, I studied scientific mechanisms of the nervous system, including basic brain and spinal functions, the five senses and how different substances and disorders interact with these functions. I then got the opportunity to learn about those same disorders from a more psychological standpoint, and studied many different diagnostic criteria for those disorders from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Taking this class and then taking a sociology course called Self in Society, which explored many holistic and societally-influenced ways of looking at similar subjects, was very important in giving me a well-rounded perspective on mental disorders.

Because I am so interested in the human mind, it was imperative that I gain experience with counseling, with delving into people's minds and helping them work through their thought processes. I got two different opportunities to do this during my undergraduate career. One was in a counseling class in which we studied and practiced different counseling techniques, and explored the therapeutic process, as well as its legal and moral limitations and challenges. I also took a course called Ending Oppression which utilizes Reevaluation Counseling. RC focuses on uncovering the ways that we have been hurt in the past to release the tension from those hurtful experiences and ultimately uncover the good, intelligent, kind, enthusiastic person within all of us. This class was incredibly significant to my growth as a young adult, as a counselor, and as an active listener.

I also spent a lot of time studying the different ways people find meaning. In a class called Personality Theories, I read Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl, which tells the story of Frankl finding meaning in his own life to help him survive the concentration camps of the Holocaust. This challenged my views on how humans find meaning in our lives, how we

react to traumatic experiences in our lives and whether or not that trauma brings us closer to or farther away from our true selves.

Experiencing the outdoors is one way I personally find meaning in life, and I have spent a lot of time incorporating this into my education. I took a course called Outdoor Recreation, of which the second half was entirely focused on rock climbing. At that point I had been climbing for over six years, so I sought out the opportunity to develop my skills as an instructor and mentor. I worked with the professor of the course to create a syllabus, and taught the class basic rock climbing techniques, physical and mental climbing skills, and ultimately how to translate those same skills to climbing outdoors at a local crag. I was simultaneously taking Education Psychology, so I got to implement my studies on our learning processes right into the outdoor experience that I was facilitating.

Less than a month later, I participated in that same professor's Outdoor Adventure course. I hiked 32 miles in the Ventana Wilderness with a dozen other students, gaining backpacking experience, learning how to properly pack a backpack, navigate with a map and compass, ration meals for large and small groups, and how to implement Leave No Trace techniques. Most importantly, though, I gained extensive hands-on experience with group dynamics and balancing many people's needs in the wilderness.

I finally got to round out this growing outdoor leadership in my final semester in Johnston, when I took both an Outdoor Leadership class and also received my Wilderness First Responder certification. These both gave me confidence in working in the outdoors to a professional level. The former required extensive trip planning, including making route and description plans, meal plans, and budgets, and also involved reflection upon different leadership styles and inclusivity and social justice in outdoor education. As a Wilderness First Responder, I became qualified in assessing and treating medical problems in wilderness settings with limited resources.

Some form of cross-cultural experience is essential to a Johnston education, and mine came when I studied at the University of Melbourne in Australia. This experience created a 180 degree shift in my social and academic contexts, and taught me how to be part of a much larger and more regimented academic environment than the one I was used to. Though incredibly difficult, this experience taught me so much about how I operate in the world, and my need for individuality and community. Those four months made me incredibly grateful for the communities that I have made in other places and for the little bits of community I began to create in Australia, too.

Community involvement is another integral part of a Johnston education, whether it is the Johnston community itself or other significant communities in one's life. Both my time as a community assistant for the Johnston residence halls and as a summer camp counselor at B'nai B'rith Camp on the Oregon coast served as influential experiences to my growth as a community member. Being a community assistant required a myriad of different tasks. These include representing Johnston in the wider university, facilitating group discussions with the goal of consensus both on my floor as well as with the entire community, helping underclassmen transition into college by being a support system for them in both social and academic ways, and reinforcing policies that help maintain everybody's trust and comfort in the community. Being a CA in Johnston ultimately was being a leader in an incredibly intentional community; it involved working with the rest of the Johnston staff through important community issues and really allowed me to develop my proficiency in not only being a leader but also working closely in a team with other leaders.

My other incredibly influential community experience was at B'nai B'rith summer camp, where I was a day camp counselor. This experience taught me how to lead large and diverse groups of children in both educational and fun activities, and how to healthily balance being both a mentor and a friend to kids. It taught me how to work with children at a wide variety of developmental levels. It taught me how to play a role in a community so different from the role that I have played in Johnston, and how to work in an extremely fast-paced environment. At B'nai B'rith camp, not only did I learn how much I love and appreciate working with children, but I also realized how much working with children can teach us about being human. The raw and open perspective that children have on the world shows us so much about our own perspectives, prejudices, and allows us to see how growing up in today's society colors our view of the world. I am incredibly grateful for this experience and am returning to B'nai B'rith as a unit head the summer after I graduate from Johnston.

I have always seen education as something that should be deeply personal and integrated into all other aspects of life, and I am incredibly grateful that I found a place where I was encouraged to build my education this way. The integration that Johnston facilitates has allowed me to explore the human experience from many different angles, and to use my own life and interactions with my surroundings and communities as a way to understand the lens through which I see the world. It also taught me how to intentionally articulate myself in a variety of settings - on paper, in front of a crowd at Tuesday afternoon community meetings, in classroom debates on weekday mornings and lively conversations on the front porch late at night. Johnston has been a continually inspiring place and I am incredibly proud of the education that I have created here.