Spring 2024

Spring Block Instructional Assistant

Rebecca Allen
Western Washington University

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Internship Title: Spring Block Instructional Assistant

Organization Worked For: CENV Spring Block

Student Name: Rebecca Allen

Internship Dates: 4/2/24 6/6/24

Faculty Advisor Name: Gene Myers

Department: ENVS

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STUDENT SIGNATURE: ____________________________

DATE: 6/26/24 ____________________________
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Internship Description

I served as TA for the 2024 Spring Block program. Spring Block is the culminating experience for the Environmental Education and Eco-Social Justice emphasis, though students of all majors are encouraged to participate. Students are in a cohort throughout spring quarter, with preparation work during winter quarter, and they participate in a wide variety of environmental education activities. I described it as “an opportunity to taste test a variety of environmental education techniques” (paraphrase), and the students agreed that it was accurate. The program shifts each year depending on partnerships, which makes Spring Block emergent and dynamic. This year, students researched and presented CulNat activities (experiential lessons about a chosen cultural/natural history topic), witnessed and supported a cultural act of sovereignty where Whatcom Intergenerational High School and Whiteswan Environmental hosted a language learning camp, shadowed local environmental teachers in both formal and informal education settings, witnessed urban eco-social justice activism, and completed a 72-hour wilderness solo. In addition, students learn how to operate in a learning community, as opposed to a typical classroom environment.

The amount of work that the students accomplished, and the value of Spring Block simply cannot be accurately captured by words. This year’s cohort managed a wide range of tasks, including logistical, social, cultural, emotional, and spiritual. Spring Block creates a space where these tasks can be held in balance and applied to non-academic experiences. Spring Block also offers a supportive community unlike any other, where everyone (students, TA, and profs) learns from and supports each other. Living in a community like this one defies many systems of oppression and helps people to begin to heal. I am grateful for the opportunity to witness that healing in the students and to experience it myself.

The TA role for Spring Block varies depending on student needs and program partnerships. This year, my role was to support the students via regular digital communication, answering questions, ensuring that all students feel like valued members of the community, and describing my experiences as a Spring Block participant in the 2023 program. We discussed the value of being a witness, and I would add that my role included witnessing the students and their learning.
As a member of the leadership team, I also attended leadership meetings to communicate student needs and practice various teaching skills, including lesson planning, problem solving, logistics, material creation, and grading. I also managed the journal project by developing insightful prompts, reviewing journal entries, and responding to entries. I responded both with words to ask questions and encourage further learning and with a watercolor art piece to thank the students for sharing their thoughts with me. I deeply enjoyed creating the gifts, since surprises are my favorite way to show that I care about a person. Each painting was inspired by the student’s CulNat presentation, which challenged me to observe varied plants and animals in enough detail to recreate them. To prepare for the solo trip, I helped to compile a reading packet with a variety of inspiring EE and social justice material. I later learned that one student was so deeply inspired by the section I pulled from Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, that she bought her own copy to continue her learning after the quarter. Another student mentioned that they were particularly inspired by the chapter that I pulled from Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer.
## Internship Agreement

**COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

### Section 1 – Student Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last Name, First Name</th>
<th>Western ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allen, Rebecca</td>
<td>W01554831</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Email Address</th>
<th>Major/PreMajor</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:allenr20@wwu.edu">allenr20@wwu.edu</a></td>
<td>ENVS Education and Bio-social Justice emphasis</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Section 2 – Registration Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Credits</th>
<th>Faculty Advisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Gene Myers</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internship Start Date</th>
<th>Internship End Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 2, 2024</td>
<td>June 6, 2024</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** You must be registered for credits during quarters you perform any part of the internship work (including Summer Session) to include writing of reports...this can be spread over multiple quarters. You are expected to register an appropriate number of credits based on anticipated hours worked BY Quarter (Example: Working 120 hours during Summer = 4 Credits Summer Enrollment).

### Section 3 – Organization for Internship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CENV Spring Block</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intern Supervisor Name</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gene Myers</td>
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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:gmyers@wwu.edu">gmyers@wwu.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<th>Phone Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(360) 927-7804</td>
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**Description of Duties (Or Attach Job Description):**
- Assist with planning, logistics, lessons, and activities
- Oversee journaling assignment: provide prompts, review journals
- Connect with students and serve as an intermediary between students and professors
- Communicate with students outside of classtime, answering questions and sending reminders over the group chat
Section 4 – Learning Objectives

- What do I intend to learn from this experience? (Be as specific as you can)
  - Improve my confidence in leading a group through a long-term program
  - Gain experience leading activities for students who are of a similar age to me
  - Build long-lasting, networking relationships with students, professors, and program partners
  - Practice experiential activity planning, clearly communicating instructions, facilitating an engaging discussion, and creating a scaffolded flow of learning.
  - Practice teaching by design, flexibility, and emergent learning
  - Deepen my understanding of eco-social justice issues and be able to explain them to students
  - Increase my general outdoor skills (quantity cooking, packing, etc)
  - Witness diverse methods of EE, observing how they are tailored to their audiences. Reflect on which methods I may want to pursue further
  - Broaden my understanding of journaling as a learning tool
  - Expand my toolbox of teaching resources, organism identifications, ecology facts, and activity ideas
  - Develop co-teaching skills and practice working with diverse skill sets and interests
  - Practice identifying, communicating, and fulfilling my needs while serving in a leadership role
  - Practice community building

How does this experience contribute to my educational or career goals:
My career goals involve becoming an effective and engaging environmental educator for students of all ages. To pursue this, I need to practice the above teaching and social concepts. I also need to gain experience by serving in teaching/leadership roles. Spring Block provides these opportunities to practice these.

Quarter by Quarter Requirements for Satisfactory Grade for Internship (Faculty MUST specify their requirements):

Section 5 - Deadlines, Evaluation, and Assessment (Completed by faculty advisor)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meet with Advisor:</th>
<th>weekly+</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Draft Due:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Draft Due:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Learning Objectives (as assigned by faculty)</td>
<td>Yes ☐  No ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Presentation Required</td>
<td>☐  ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily/Weekly Log Required</td>
<td>☐  ☐</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Section 6 – Students Certification

I certify that I have read the University Policy on Risk Management Considerations for Student Internships and I will report any injuries suffered while performing internship promptly to WWU.

https://policy.wwu.edu/POL-U2100.03-Managing-the-Risk-of-Off-Campus-Experiential-Learning-Programs

I will endeavor to represent myself and my college well and will abide by the relevant policies, procedures and ethical standards of the university and my internship organization.

I understand that **30-hours of work per credit earned** is expected for an internship. I understand that I am expected to enroll in a number of credits commensurate with hours worked each quarter.

Student’s Signature/Date

Rebecca 4/17/24

Section 7 – Internship Site Supervisor Certification

I have reviewed the student’s indicated learning objectives and on behalf of my organization agree:

- To enrich the Student’s knowledge by orienting him/her to the occupation, the work setting, and the responsibilities relating to the assignment
- To regularly evaluate/provide feedback to student on progress, projects and areas of growth
- At or near the completion of the assignment to provide an evaluation of the student’s performance
- To review and approve the Student’s Learning Plan and communicate with the college if areas are not going to be met.
- To supply the student with, and abide by the organization’s policy against discrimination and/or harassment in the workplace
- To contact the instructor or the College of the Environment Internship Coordinator (360) 650-3646, ed.weber@wwu.edu should any problems arise

Internship Site Supervisor’s Signature/Date

Sylvia G. Hadnot hadnots@wwu.edu 206.473.8030

Section 8 – Faculty Advisor Certification

I certify that the student intern and I have reached agreement on the learning objectives and academic expectations for this experience. I have assigned appropriate educational requirements for each quarter of the experience. These objectives are challenging and enriching to the student’s academic and/or career goals. I will award grades after satisfactory completion of all learning objectives assigned for each quarter registered by student. I have counseled student on registration requirement during quarters in which work is done.

Faculty Advisor’s Signature/Date

Olum Eugene Myers Jr.

Section 9 – College of the Environment Internship Coordinator

Actions:
1. Review Agreement
2. Update Course Override
3. File Agreement in Student Records
4. Communicate with Employers as necessary during internship

Self-evaluation/Reflection
Typically in an experience like this I create a long list of goals and expectations for myself. Most of them are unrealistic, and I never write them down so that I’m not disappointed if I don’t live up to my expectations. Creating the contract at the start of this quarter was intimidating, since I knew that what I expected to happen and what actually happened would not match at all. However, I am pleasantly surprised. While the past quarter was not at all what I expected, the foundational elements that I used as inspiration to create my goals were consistent. I may not be an expert in each skill, but I see significant growth. Thus, I feel that I succeeded in reaching all of my goals. I feel that this is an important lesson that I can apply to future projects; when setting goals, base them on foundational elements and strive for growth rather than perfection.

This internship absolutely met my goal of gaining experiencing designing an effective education program for college-age students. I feel much more confident in my abilities to create emergent programming that responds to students needs and is resilient to inevitable challenges. I found that the leadership team built our design around the question, “what do the students need to best support their learning right now?”. Subconsciously, we held a planning meeting every time the social environment changed. For example, we held a meeting after a particularly intense class session involving a medical situation and racial injustice. We met to talk through the event and determine how the leadership team needed to respond. As a result, the group was able to not only regain the trust and sense of safety that was present before the event, but also build a stronger community.

I have also gained skills in SEL (Social-emotional learning). I witnessed just how crucial SEL is for any education program and any community in general, as it provides tools to discuss challenges and emotions in a healthy, productive way. This prevents conflict and ensures that every student feels supported and capable of learning. I had been warned that Spring Block inevitably includes tension between the students and professors. However, this year presented very little tension, and I believe that is because of the community building and SEL that the leadership team integrated into the first half of the program.

In addition to the foundational elements that I anticipated, this experience presented many lessons that I never could have expected. I value these lessons more than achieving my goals, since they are often applicable to my personal life, and are likely to be applicable to future roles. On a spiritual level, I also believe that emergent lessons are a gift, and are presented at the time in my life when I need them most. While I couldn’t possibly list all of these lessons, they include how to make a program inclusive and rewarding considering medically diverse needs, many SEL techniques and values, spiritual realizations, and how to make space for my voice. Most importantly, I continued a journey towards self-respect and self-love that I (unknowingly) started during the 2023 program.

Students who value education, community, emergent learning, and experiential learning would enjoy this experience. In addition, students who want to gain skills in flexibility, community building, SEL, and general leadership would most benefit from this experience. This
holds true regardless of student social orientation – introvert, extrovert, BIPOC, non-education major, etc – all provide a valuable perspective to the program and are capable of succeeding.

My coursework provided a crucial foundation for the experiential application completed as a TA. Obviously, completing the 2023 Spring Block program was a requirement to be able to understand and respond to the needs of the 2024 program. Last year’s program, in addition to the Puerto Rico study abroad trip, provided experience in community building, an introduction to SEL, and an understanding of the importance of cultural foods. The Literature of Nature and Place course taught me writing skills that were helpful in leading the journal assignment. Lit of Nature and Place also provided a repertoire of diverse readings that was helpful in creating the solo reading packet. The curriculum for environmental education course prepared me to develop effective, emergent, inclusive, and experiential lesson plans. Through ample practice, I was prepared to teach this skill to students and provide feedback on their lesson plans.

Being a reporter for The Planet Magazine deepened my skills in collaborating with Indigenous community members. I wrote a story about the memorial ceremonies and scientific discussions regarding Tokitae, a captive Southern Resident orca who passed away last summer. Indigenous perspectives were essential to capture Tokitae’s complete story, so I interviewed multiple Lummi and general Salish Indigenous eco-activists. Learning how to hold space and accurately represent a culture that is different from mine, particularly a spiritual culture that can be difficult to thoroughly describe in English, prepared me for the camas bake during the language learning camp. This skill will be particularly beneficial as I prepare to serve as a Naturalist at Camp Nor’wester, where the language learning camp was held, since I will be representing the cultural significance of the camas bake to my co-workers.

Social justice was a consistent theme that was woven throughout all of my courses. The culminating impact of these courses prepared me to co-learn with Sylvia Hadnot and be receptive to her mentorship. It also prepared me for the various opportunities to witness and value social justice work as presented in this program.
12 June 2024
Supervisor/Advisor letter for Rebecca Allen’s internship

Rebecca Allen has served as an undergraduate teaching assistant to our intensive field practicum in the field of education and eco-social justice during spring quarter 2024. The program is a “block” of four linked courses (17 quarter credits) taken in the spring by the same set of junior or senior college of the environment students, and is thus called the “Spring Block.” Rebecca completed this program in 2023 as a student and returned to be part of the teaching team with two professors. (Administratively for her internship contract, one of us was her advisor and one her site supervisor. But in reality, all the work is done as a unit and we both played both roles.) She had approached us last spring about this, and then followed through in the fall, then helping us with recruitment and application review in the fall, and the preparatory seminar in the winter, plus a basically full-time commitment to the program in the spring.

Rebecca sought every opportunity to contribute and stretch her skills and perspectives. As an integral member of our teaching team, she consistently brought up important questions or needs from the students’ perspectives as we designed and carried out the prep and program quarters. She helped establish an open and supportive atmosphere with the group by sharing her experiences, providing examples and reflections on what had worked and what had not the previous year, for example in helping students orient to the May return visit to the island while, and after, we visited it with some of our Indigenous program partners in early April.

She also coached the students as teams formed to craft lessons for the Whatcom Intergenerational High Schoolers we would return with. She gave special help to the marine / intertidal lesson group, as that is a special area of knowledge and pedagogical know-how for her. But she also helped the 13 Moons / Phenology group, and the food plants / fire ecology group as they worked on their plans during the in-between weeks visit.

She also visited the sites of the Mini-Practicums with local classroom / outdoor educators to which the students were assigned so as to understand the students’ experiences better.

One of the responsibilities she took on fully was the student journals. She composed weekly prompts for the students to respond to, prompting them to reflect on important emotional / intellectual and practical aspect of the phase of the quarter and their own experiences. She read the journals thorough and provided specific, relevant, supportive and gently directive comments. In years of seeing assistants’ comments on journals, I have seldom seen such a thoughtful and sensitive job of this. She ably represented the program goals and perspective in the ways she supported and challenged / coached each student. On top of this achievement, she created watercolor art pieces for each student, placing them with a note in their journals. Rebecca’s work on student journals alone was an impressive contribution.

Throughout the program, Rebecca was considerate, reliable, mature, and able to navigate relationships with tact. She also shared of herself. In watching her, we each saw, and noted, the huge strides of growth during the term, but moreover across the two to three years we have each known Rebecca. She is such a solid person, and very well launched as a reflective, competent educator of, about, in and for environmental and social justice. We are so very grateful she wanted to serve as a TA in the Spring Block.

Sincerely,

Gene Myers, Ph.D. 
Sylvia G. Hadnot, M.Ed.

gmyers@wwu.edu 
hadnots@wwu.edu; sylvia@haseverything.co

Active Minds Changing Lives
Appendix - Photos

Figure 1: Watercolor art pieces that I made for each student. Each piece was inspired by their CulNat presentation. I slipped them into their journals as a thank you for letting me read their journals and offering feedback.

Figure 2: The leadership team wearing silly hats while offering feedforward on a group’s lesson plan in preparation for the language learning camp. Photo taken by a student (I can’t remember who – Sage? Karis?).
Figure 3: Me rinsing cooked camas in the ocean after the camas bake ceremony. This was considered an offering to the ocean, since the ocean had not tasted camas in so many years. I was sick during the language learning camp trip, and was unable to participate in most of the activities. I was very grateful that I was well enough to witness the camas bake ceremony and help rinse the camas, as it was a beautifully spiritual event. I was wishing that my throat had healed enough to sing to the camas while I was rinsing it as I was instructed. Photo taken by Silas.
Figures 4 and 5: I made art to create an inspiring, welcoming space for the students to enter as they regathered after their solo. One element of the art piece was curtains made out of lichen and hung over the path for the students to walk through.
Figures 6-8: The centerpiece of the solo art. I included a muskrat skull that Gene found while setting a camera, Olympia beer cans that Sylvia found at the dump, invasive iris flowers and leaves that Gene removed from the land, ducks that a student gifted the leadership team, rocks that Sylvia collected, a cornucopia that I wove out of iris leaves, and cottonwood fluff that had been snowing down on us throughout the solo. Each element of the centerpiece represented a memory from the leadership team’s experience during the solo that warmed my heart.