



Winter 2024

Outback Farm Intern

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Recommended Citation

Head, Reign M., "Outback Farm Intern" (2024). *College of the Environment Internship Reports*. 218.
https://cedar.wvu.edu/cenv_internship/218

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COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT



MAKE WAVES.

Internship Title: Outback Farm

Organization Worked For: Western Washington University

Student Name: Reign Head

Internship Dates: 6/7/23 12/15/24

Faculty Advisor Name Kate Darby

Department ENVS



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STUDENT SIGNATURE

DATE: 3/21/24

Outback Farm Internship

The [Outback Farm](#) is a fifty-plus year old working farm located on Western Washington University's Campus. The Outback serves students as an educational space for learning about agricultural practices and food justice. The Outback Farm also resides on a protected wetland. Within the five acres at the Outback Farm there is a community garden –that is free for students, staff, and community members to use–, a herb garden, an educational garden –where the majority of the food is grown–, an apiary, a chicken coop with twelve beautiful chickens, and a large permaculture food forest. The farm serves Western's campus by supplying the food pantries on campus with fresh fruits, vegetables, eggs, and other resources.

For the first four months of working at the Outback Farm I worked as the Engagement/Communication Coordinator. In this position, I was responsible for organizing events, publicizing the farm, managing the community gardens, and being a main point of contact for the farm . A few events I planned, organized, and worked at were our summer Free Farmer's Markets (see Appendix C) –an event where we gave away our produce to students for no cost. Another I planned –that got canceled due to a sewage leak– was the Fall Harvest Jubilee (see Appendix B). While planning these events I would create graphics to advertise our events and post on platforms like WWIN (Western's Involvement Network), Instagram, and Facebook. When I had help for the event itself I would direct our crew on how and what to harvest. While I was in the Engagement/Communications Coordinator position my supervisor was on leave, so I became the main point contact for everything regarding the farm. A lot of my job was spent emailing community members, students, and WWU staff. During the time I spent in this position I was also managing the community gardens which included updating an excel sheet to people on a waitlist and plots assignments, checking in with community gardeners about the status or

about concerns with their plots, re-assigning people plots, and emailing community gardeners about new information relevant to them. My position quickly turned into a mostly remote work situation since it was a lot of work on the computer.

When the Permaculture Coordinator position opened in November 2023, I switched positions, because I am more interested in working in the field than at a desk. I was drawn to this position because the Permaculture Farm contains a lot of fruit trees –which is where the majority of my career background focused on. I also was interested in this position because I wanted to learn more about wetland eco-restoration and also because I prefer to work outside.

Some of my favorite parts of working in the Permaculture Position are leading work parties weekly and fruit tree pruning. I really enjoy leading work parties because it allows me to further develop my leadership skills and also pass some of my knowledge from past careers, classes, and my time as a WSU Master Gardener to students interested in pursuing a career in horticulture/agriculture. At my work parties (see Appendix D) I got to train students how to prune fruit trees and how to identify specific species of plants including noxious weeds. I really enjoyed helping students make connections and facilitating a sense of community through these weekly meetings.

The aspects that were more challenging for me through this internship were our weekly staff meetings and meetings regarding our indefinite funding. During my internship the Associated Students Financial Committee decided to drop the funding suddenly and without warning to the Outback. The AS is who funds my position and is the majority of the Outbacks funding. There has not been a solution to our funding issue, so there is not a lot of job security at this point in time. Meetings around this subject have been hard for me to participate in because of the uncertainty and hoops of how the school funds groups.

My experience as a student coordinator at the Outback Farm helped me to develop my leadership skills, provided me financial support during my education, gave me the freedom to explore different interests, and gave me insights into some hurdles that a non-profit group may face.

My position as a coordinator enabled me to develop my leadership skills in a professional setting. I often advised and directed a group of three student workers and collaborated with other coordinators to keep our operations going. My favorite parts of working at the Outback was exchanging horticultural knowledge with volunteers, community members, and coworkers. Through this position I got to learn my leadership style and got better at embracing leading through weekly work parties.

At the weekly work parties, I would normally have a lot of volunteers who were fresh to WWU. I would often host work parties with anywhere from 3-15 people. For myself, I know when I started WWU I would volunteer in an effort to seek community so I really enjoyed learning to create a community space at the Outback. I've always been somewhat shy, but I was able to learn how to be more confident with facilitating conversation and speaking in front of a group. Some ways that I would try to build a community feeling was through simple group questions like "How is everyone's quarter going?" I found often through small questions by the end of the work parties everyone would be talking and engaging each other. I would also share opportunities like agricultural classes, farm's I heard were hiring, and Outback events with the groups so that they could expand more on their interest in agriculture. I'm grateful to have had this little community myself also because we always have an amazing diverse group of people

from different backgrounds. Some of them were new to gardening and others brought knowledge to share.

I found my leadership style to be pretty relaxed with my coworkers and my volunteers. When I needed to take a leadership position, I would often give options when asking the group what they wanted to work on for that day. I would take opportunities to empower others to learn new things rather than having them do monotonous tasks. I became more confident with speaking up in work situations, building up and affirming others on their work, and helping guide others on different projects on the farm. My leadership skills I've gained through this internship I can take with me into a future career. I hadn't had experiences before where I got to be a leader, so I think it will definitely help me with future job prospects.

Another way this internship helped me is by providing me some financial support for my education and less student debt in the future. This internship was great, because it allowed me to work up to 19 hours, and though it was stressful at times to balance full-time school, college, and life I am grateful to have a job during my college education. Also, because it fulfilled my internship credit, I was able to take lighter loads for winter and fall quarter.

The Outback being such a large property with a lot of student interest there are always many projects happening at once, which can be overwhelming, but also provides the opportunity to explore many horticultural topics. I have a background of working in apple orchards—coming from Wenatchee, Washington—, so I was excited that the Food Forest had so many fruit trees. Even many I had never seen before like quince. I enjoyed learning about how to care for fruit trees other than apples. Also coming from Eastern Washington a lot of the plants in Western Washington were foreign to me. I got to learn a lot about which plants are invasive, native, edible, and culturally important to different groups in the Salish Sea.

In winter quarter, the group on campus that funds the Outback Farm quickly and quietly withdrew their funding from the farm. Our farm was not prepared for these changes and I almost lost my position. This hurdle has opened my eyes to the hurdles that a non-profit –such as the Outback– may face through their operations. The farm has been running for fifty plus years through the work of students. This cut was for the student positions, the farm manager, and the majority of the farm's budget. For a couple months, my biggest priority at work was meeting with different groups and leaders on campus trying to secure funding to save the farm and to save my job. I feel as though this experience has given me some insight to the hurdles of working for a nonprofit and for a non-profit seeking grants, approval, and money.

Before coming to Western, I had a history of working in agriculture. From 2018 to 2023 I became trained and certified as a Washington State University Master Gardener Volunteer. Through this program I got a lot of training through classes, workshops, and long time master gardeners on a variety of horticultural topics. In 2019, I began working in the agricultural industry as a greenhouse assistant and later in 2021 I became a horticulturalist for a big apple grower. Having had careers and experience in agriculture really prepared me for working at the Outback Farm. I was able to take a lot of skills and knowledge into this position, but still continue to learn more about horticulture/agriculture through working at the Outback Farm.

Another thing that I feel helped me in my internship was learning about social justice topics in my College of the Environment courses. My course work in ENVS 327: Intro to Soils winter quarter provided me a lot of information on how to work with different soils as it regards agriculture. My environmental studies classes that spoke on social justice topics like ENVS 303: Intro to Environmental Studies Human Ecology and Ethics, SALI 201: Intro to the Salish Sea, and ESCI 499A: College of the Environment Speak Series all gave me a lot of insight to the

Salish Sea and the indigenous groups that live here. This information really helped me in this position, because I learned about culturally important plants that the Outback has like nettles, camas, cedars and others. I was not familiar with many of the plants in the Salish Sea region before moving here, so I learned a lot in these classes.

Appendix:

Time Sheet (Appendix A)

<u>Quarter</u>	<u>Hrs:</u>	<u>Description:</u>
<u>Fall 2023:</u>	5	Outreach
	30	Community Garden Management
	35	Communications emails/calling
	50	Social Media
	30	Work on Farm
	12	Weekly Staff Meetings
	12	Weekly Staff Work Parties
	6	Volunteer Work Parties
	10	Hiring Committee/Search Party duties
	<u>190</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Winter 2024:</u>	15	Weekly Staff Meetings
	20	Weekly Staff Work Parties
	22	Forest Garden Volunteer Work Parties
	3	Salish Sea Seed Swap Event Help
	20	Maintenance on structures such as fixing bridges or gates
	80	Food Forest Managing: Pruning Fruit Trees, pruning bushes back, laying chips on walking paths, noxious weed removal.
	8	Writing report for Credit
	<u>178</u>	<u>Total</u>

Fall Harvest Jubilee Graphic (Appendix B):



Instagram/Facebook Post Caption: Please save the date for our Fall Harvest Jubilee on October 27th from 4pm-6pm. There will be food trucks, live music, fun activities, and prizes! (A flyer with leaves, pumpkins, and mushroom graphics. In text, " The Outback Farm/Fall Harvest Jubilee. Friday, October 27th/4pm-6pm/Live music, food trucks, raffle, prizes, and other fun activities)

(This is a flyer I created with Canva.com and distributed through campus to promote the Fall Harvest Jubilee 2023. I also posted on our social media this flyer with the text shown above.)

Free Farmer's Market Graphic (Appendix C):



Instagram/Facebook Post Caption: We are having to reschedule our September Market for staff training.

On Tuesday September 12th from 12-2pm we will be having our Free Farmer's Market at the WWU Outback's Outdoor Classroom! We will have a variety of fresh garden produce from the farm along with some non-perishables. Please bring your own bag!

Please DM or email as.outback.communications@wwu.edu with any questions or for accessibility accommodations.

(A picture or a wheelbarrow of plums, a bucket of potatoes, and a bucket of zucchini. A picture of onions and salad greens on a table. A small graphic that says, "Bring your own bag".)

(A graphic I created through Canva.com to promote our summer Free Farmer's Market. This was posted to the Outback Farm's Instagram and Facebook page.)

Weekly Volunteer Work Party (Appendix D):



(A picture of some student volunteers at one of the weekly work parties Fall Quarter 2023.)