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The Laureate's Journey & Culmination

My time at *The Laureate* began quickly—the person who was the original editor of the publication had left mysteriously, and I was to begin the duties of Editor-in-Chief in October 2018. Having that role was something I had dreamed of since arriving on campus three years ago as a freshman, new to college and excited to figure out the specifics of what I wanted to do with my life so that when people asked, I could give them a more detailed answer than “Something in English!” Finally, I had the opportunity to dip my toe into the profession I realized that I wanted to pursue as a career later in my life.

At first, the list of obligations seemed extremely overwhelming, but I decided to take it one bullet point at a time. Since I had come on later than normal, it felt like I was going to be playing a single-person game of catch up, but as I began chipping away at the list, it seemed less like work and more like a good time. As I began my journey, I met Jessie Fales, the Editor-in-Chief the previous year, and Megan Bossio, who was my assistant editor, both of whom I enjoyed spending time with. Jessie consistently assured me I was doing well and helped me via text change the Facebook page to reflect the eighteenth edition of *The Laureate* and what I envisioned for the journal. With the requirements and due date updated, I set out to letting the students know it was time to send in their best work.

Canva was a no-brainer for creating fliers—I had used the app the previous year during my work as a Resident Assistant to advertise programs and speakers that visited the building. The app is easy to navigate and offers plenty of free templates for a variety of options, such as brochures and social media posts. I selected a bright template, added my text, and sent it off to Facebook, eager for *The Laureate's* email account to ping with a new message.

Weeks went by, and I kept posting on social media and hanging fliers around campus, letting students know that submissions were open. I had received two submissions and felt excited to watch more tumble in. This wasn't exactly the case. To remedy the lack of submissions, Jessie suggested making an Instagram account for the journal, since the only social media it thrived on was Facebook, as tumblr and Twitter hadn't fared too well. I set to making an Instagram page only to realize one was already in use, but there were no posts. Every time I posted a reminder on Facebook with my Canva-created virtual flier, I did the same to Instagram and made sure to tag every place on Western's campus I could, including the Richmond Center for Visual Arts and the Bernhard Center, along with popular registered student organizations (RSOs) like WMU Ceramics Guild and You Beautiful Black Woman. I wanted everybody to send their poems, stories, pictures, art, or plays. I wanted a diverse array of inspirational views on life, I wanted a group of students who were proud of their works whether the pieces they submitted were products of their majors or simply creative hobbies.

However, it almost felt like no one wanted to submit their works, no matter how many people interacted with the posts. I began No Lazy Days November, where I created a new Canva post each day with a different writing or art prompt. These posts began with prompts from websites for writers, but slowly morphed into what I thought would be interesting to write about. This garnered many likes and follows on Instagram, and slowly, as the deadline approached, my inbox, like a persistently leaky faucet, dripped a few submissions in each week.

As I began reading the pieces, I knew which ones I wanted and which ones I didn't almost immediately. Many I included in the journal, but some, like a psychoanalysis of a classic novel, were clearly not going to be selected. Most of the pieces I received were poems that ranged from inward perspectives to outside explanations of relationships and other people. When

more fiction came in, I was ecstatic—fiction is my first love, and I knew there were incredible writers out there from all the fiction workshops I had taken. In an attempt to get more submissions, I began targeting people whom I knew produced incredible work, those whose work I had been able to see, and those who came highly recommended by mentors. Finally, I had a cohesive working manuscript that, while all the works weren't exactly connected, worked as a collection.

Unfortunately, the tasks weren't always easy. The editing process was by far the most difficult because the only mode of communication between the contributors and myself was email. I would take suggestions made by others and compile them into a long email asking the author or artist if the changes the team proposed would be something they would like changed. At one point, I had to chase an author down via Facebook messenger to finally get them to reply to my email. Some choices that that author kept, among others, weren't always what seemed cohesive to the team as a whole, but before I even began editing, I wanted to make sure that the students' pieces were as true to them as possible. There were times I didn't enjoy how the author chose to keep their pieces, but I tried my absolute best to respect how they saw their creation.

Another small snag came during the placing of the submissions. Upon review of past editions of *The Laureate*, I noticed how some of them were grouped by genre, so I decided that I would use the same format. When I shuffled the pieces around, I realized that I had more poems than anything else. The poetry section was long while the drama section was a single short play. After the first design meeting, I shuffled the pieces back around without sections to make a more cohesive manuscript and set to editing that, which ended in a better-flowing manuscript.

Another snag that I hit regarded a piece that dealt with a president and a large bomb, which I originally included, but upon further review and collaboration with others, it was taken

out. The piece was something that I wasn't totally sure about putting in, but I felt very thankful that I had a group of other people to help make the decision. Making the publication accessible for all without having a half-hearted commentary on a controversial president turning readers away from it was important to the integrity of the journal. Censorship is a big issue within the English community, and I wasn't sure if I would put the piece in or take it out, but thanks to the other people on the team, a final decision was made to remove the work. While we all agreed that censorship should not be practiced in the creative community, the piece would not make the cut since it wasn't pictured as a satire or a commentary. Making these decisions are easier with others who can chime in, which made the process feel less daunting but ensured that I still had ownership of the compilation I was creating.

Once that was done, I was so lucky to get meet the design students who would be designing the journal. The three students had an idea that meshed so well with the feeling of the journal. Most of the pieces had the common theme of introspection as well as interpersonal communications and relationships, and the students wanted to reflect those in their design of the book. The underwater theme made sense, as the water would be a filter through which an object would be viewed reflected the idea of filtering a view of either the self or another person through a certain lens. After meeting the students, I felt like the publication would only get better from the simple Google doc on my computer that my team and I had edited meticulously for hours to an actual book that so many people had worked so diligently on.

The students got to work on the publication's design and I eagerly awaited the preview. The underwater elements that the students were thinking about made me almost impatient; I couldn't wait to see what was going to be made of the manuscript I had spent hours compiling. The first online preview that I got took my breath away. The pages had geometric shapes and

swirls, but not too much to outshine the pieces. It gave the publication an entirely new vibe that brought the vision that the design students and I had to life. It meant one step closer to holding a physical book that celebrated all kinds of highly impressive and revolutionary student work.

In late March, the design team had printed a layout of what the journal would look like, this time including the cover. I kept staring at the colorful design that blended reflective rainbows and triangles—the design and the content had finally become an incredible, cohesive unit. I was one step closer to holding a book in my hands that I had worked endlessly on, that I knew from cover to cover, that was a culmination of my excitement and love to make student voices heard. It showed my dedication to a project that served as a capstone to my time at WMU.

When I think about the moment that I get my diploma from the Lee Honors College saying I completed my thesis, it almost doesn't feel real. The work I put into *The Laureate* didn't really feel like work; instead, it felt like something that I was meant to do, something I genuinely wanted to do. My mark on campus might not be deeply researched, graphed, charted, and peer-reviewed, but it represents those whose careers don't follow the "safe" path of STEM, who choose to nurture their drive for creativity, self-expression, and entertainment. I'm even more ecstatic to further my career in English so I can be the advocate for those whose careers don't align with the careers others think they should have. Being able to foster a space for creators while still keeping with my independence, ideas, and originality on campus is a rewarding feeling that only comes from following lifelong dreams, and I am so glad I was able to foster creativity through acting as the editor-in-chief of the eighteenth edition of *The Laureate*.