



The Path from GEAR UP Wyoming

Summer 2022 | Vol. 2.1

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Even in summer, GEAR UP Wyoming stays busy and strives to serve our participants! Check out the latest news:

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What is our mission?

GEAR UP Wyoming strives to increase the number of low-income students who graduate high school and enter a post-secondary educational institution to improve their access to career and life opportunities. Visit our [page!](#)

Here are our spring updates:

Student Spotlight | Brianna | What Do You Do With an MA in English?

This quarter, we sat down with GEAR UP Wyoming alum, Brianna. We were thrilled because this is our first student spotlight of someone who has completely finished school and entered the workforce. Brianna got her BA (bachelor of arts) and MA (master of arts) in English from the University of Wyoming after transferring from Casper College, and now she works as an academic and career advisor on campus. Studying fields in the humanities (like English) presents its own challenges, but Brianna excelled in her classes, finished school with no debt, and was able to enter a stable career that she was introduced to during grad school. We're so proud of her and are excited to see what she does next!

Here's the interview transcript:

Hi, my name is Christian I am the GEAR UP Wyoming Student Ambassador, I have here with me today, Brianna – she's joining us in the University of Wyoming Studio Coe Voice Box. Brianna, will you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Sure! My name is Brianna. I'm from Casper, Wyoming, and I was a GEAR UP student at Casper College back in the day and now I work at the University of Wyoming.



Click the image to view the video

(Continued)

Student Spotlight (Continued)

That's exciting! Why did you want to go to college?

I always loved school and it was something I was really good at. There was one near me – I'm from Casper, so Casper College was right there. I wanted to stay home with my family, so it was easy for me to just jump right in and keep working and go to school at the same time. It was just kind of accessible and I had fun in my classes.

That's awesome. It sounds like passion for education and convenience are really what drove you to college then. How did you decide what you wanted to study?

I went into college undeclared and I didn't really have a sense of what I wanted to do. I had really liked doing music and I really liked doing theater in high school. Then I had my political science 1000 teacher tell me that I was a very good writer and he said "I think you should work at the writing center and I think you should consider and English major," so I went over to the enrollment services office and declared English. I didn't really think twice about it. I don't think I felt very encouraged in my high school English settings so to hear that from them it was just kind of validating and I was like oh I can do an English major then.

It's awesome to hear that a professor helped motivate you to choose a direction. Did you get any support, financial aid or otherwise through college?

Tons. I did have a lot of familial support from my parents. I think there is a certain stigma around doing a humanities degree in Wyoming, and my parents were stoked about it. They were really excited that I decided to do English. On the financial side I was just bringing in financial aid left and right I mean from any number of things which was so unexpected for me. When I was initially going into college I didn't expect it to be affordable because the conversation was always "oh you're going to end up in so much debt and it's gonna be really scary," and then when I got to college I found out that through my GEAR UP scholarship, through the Pell Grant, through a couple other miscellaneous scholarships I received I was able to pay for my school with no debt.

That's amazing and so exciting. I feel like the conversation often does revolve around how much debt you're going to have after school and very rarely around ways that you can manage that and prevent that from happening. I'm happy to hear that you were able to get through without any debt. Did you go to grad school?

I did. After I graduated with my bachelor's from UW Casper in 2016, they had a space open in the M.A. in English down here in Laramie. My undergraduate adviser, Arielle Zibrak, said, "What do you think about filling this spot in the spring?"

Within a matter of three weeks I went from being a bartender at Olive Garden to "I'm a graduate student here in Laramie." I loved my courses. Working on the thesis and all of that... not as much – wasn't my thing. I don't think I'll ever go on to be an academic, never going to a PhD program, nothing. But, the faculty were amazing and the other students were really cool too. I'm glad I did it.

That's awesome, and that's a lot of hard work you have to put into grad school. That's amazing. What was life like for you after graduating?

I jumped right into working full time as an advisor and that's pretty much what I've been doing ever since. I got into advising while I was in the English department. They offered me a summer gig doing academic advising for incoming freshmen and transfer students. I never thought I'd stay working in higher ed or be an advisor or anything and with that experience I learned that that's not too bad a career and something that I could really see myself doing forever.

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Student Spotlight (Continued)

It sounds like your education really opened up a lot of opportunities for you in the workforce. Do you have any advice that you'd like to give for current GEAR UP Wyoming participants?

I think I missed out on a lot of opportunities in college just because I felt like I wasn't the type of student to study abroad or the type of student to do this thing. I think if I'd had a little bit more confidence initially going in, and you know kind of seeing myself as a legit college student that's the same as anyone else I think I would've been a lot more open to certain opportunities for sure.

Thank you for joining us here today at the University of Wyoming Studio Coe Voice Box. I appreciate all of your insight. That's all folks!

Summer Academy Report

This summer, GEAR UP Wyoming hosted its first Summer Academy at the University of Wyoming (UW) since 2017! We were thrilled to welcome almost 100 high school participants from across Wyoming for four days of action-packed learning here on campus.

Students stayed in Downey Hall, had meals at the Washakie Dining Center, and attended activities across the UW campus to learn more about college, academics, majors, careers, and resources.

We also welcomed ten college students — many of whom were GEAR UP participants in the past — to serve as residential leaders. This allowed participants a chance to talk to possible mentors who were in their shoes and are now pursuing successful paths in college.

We know pictures speak louder than words, so have a look at our favorite photos from the event:



When you're finished, be sure to check out our survey results on the next page!

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Summer Academy (Survey Results)

While we had a blast at this year's summer academy, we'd be remiss to assume that everyone had as great a time. So, we were sure to collect surveys from our staff and participants to see how things went. Here are some highlights:

- 70% of participants had a meaningful interaction with their group leader or staff
- 78% of respondents rated the student panel as 4 or 5 (out of 5) — This panel allowed participants to ask college students questions about their college experience
- We had a tie for the two most popular activities:
 - The Makerspace tour, where students got to visit the UW [Wyrkshop](#) and make 3D prints, glass etching, and other industrial arts
 - The [Art Museum](#) tour, where students got to visit the Centennial Complex, learn about graphic design principles, and design an airbrushed t-shirt with their personal logo on it.
- We also wanted to thank our partner, [Paradigm Shift](#), for their wildly popular large group activities.

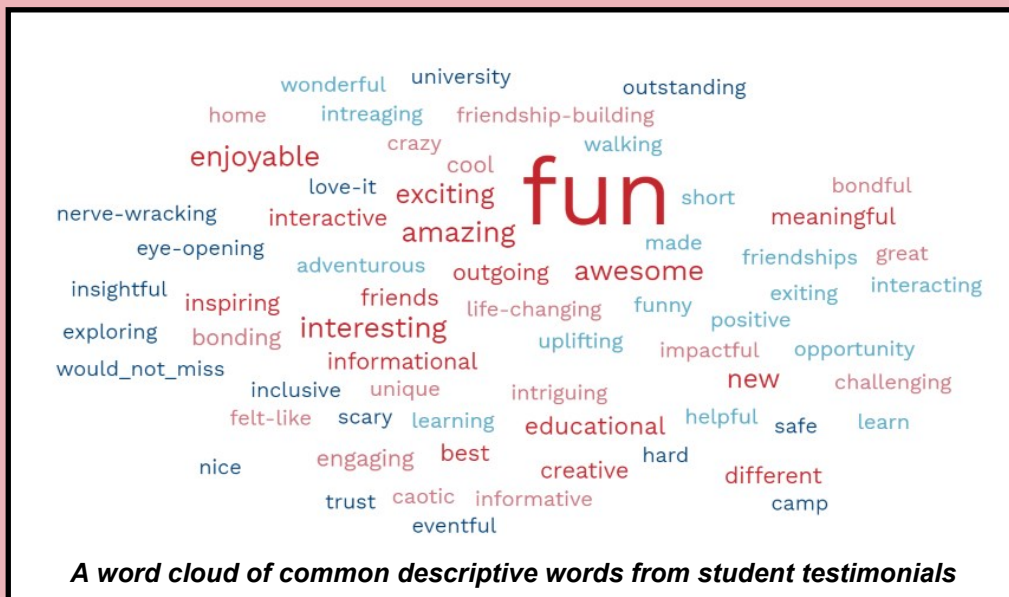
We also received some heartfelt testimonials from students about their group leaders:

[about Eduardo] seeing someone of color and someone who has been through the same struggles I have and has preserved was very nice to see and reassured me that I can also do it.

[Mackenzie] impacted me just by being really sweet, creating conversation with me, and making me feel just like an amazing person. She's extremely encouraging and uplifting towards everyone

[Kalli] helped me realize that i could improve my essay and convinced me to try my best.

Check out the word cloud below to see some other key adjectives students used to talk about camp. And, finally, **stay tuned next spring for information about GEAR UP Summer Academy 2023!**



Leadership Summit 2022

Almost immediately after summer academy, the GEAR UP Wyoming team at UW invited GEAR UP participants to join them in Lander, Wyoming for a 3-day leadership summit.

These participants had just graduated high school and were planning to attend college in the fall. The goal of the leadership summit was to give these young adults an opportunity to learn about good group leadership from [NOLS \(the National Outdoor Leadership Summit\)](#).

During the NOLS “Leadership Navigation Training,” these rising college freshmen used GPS devices to locate geocaches across Lander. The group with the best cooperative ability that located the most caches was the winner!



We also visited the [Sinks Canyon State Park](#) office to learn more about careers in outdoor management and tourism, and enjoyed a spectacular hike guided by the park rangers. As we ventured up the mountain, students worked together to support each other, take breaks when needed, and ensure everyone was safe.

In between these active adventures, we sat down with the future college freshmen to answer questions they had about college admissions, financial aid, dorm life, and academics. Some students feel overwhelmed by the idea of starting college in the fall and decide not to attend (known as college “summer melt”), and we hoped that this leadership summit prevented this phenomenon for some GEAR UP Wyoming participants.

If you’re a senior graduating this year, please keep your eyes open for information about the summer 2023 Leadership Summit!

GEAR UP Wyoming
uwyo.edu/gearup

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