

EXED PORTFOLIO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to my Experiential Education	2
I. Identification of Strengths and Areas for Personal Growth	3
II. Challenges and Acquisition of Skills	5
III. Commitment and Perseverance in the Face of Challenges	6
IV. The Process of (Community) Building.....	7
V. Collaborative Working.....	9
VI. Engagement with Issues of Global Significance.....	10
VII. Reflections on the Ethics of Choices	11
VIII. The Role of Privilege and Power.....	12
IX. Community Engagement and Service.....	13
X. My Perceived Shortcomings of the UWC-USA ExEd Program.....	14
XI. Reflections: Cultural Day Shows.....	16
XII. Reflections: Event Planning and AGORA	18
XIII. Reflections: United World College Football Club (UWC FC)	19
XIV. Reflections: Buenos Para Todos (BPT)	21
XV. Reflections: CEC	22

INTRODUCTION TO MY EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Throughout my time at UWC-USA, both on and off campus, the “Experiential Education”-Program (ExEd) has been a core element of my experiences. It has provided the experience itself; it has opened space for reflection on other experiences; it has been a recreation from other experiences; it has inspired me; it has challenged me in a multiplicity of ways. This list is non-exhaustive and will hopefully be close(r) to be completed through this ExEd portfolio. I have chosen to structure my reflections and documentation based on the UWC-USA ExEd Learning Outcomes in order to provide a simple to understand but holistic impression of my UWC-USA ExEd experience. Additional to a general introduction and reflection on each learning outcome, this portfolio provides specific reflections on experiences that fall within my experiential education at UWC-USA.

Semester 1:

ExEds: Soccer Co-Ed, Youth Detention Centre, Volleyball, African Chorus, Percussion Ensemble, Silk Road Ensemble, Music Improv,

Wilderness: First-Year Orientation Overnight Trip, Grand Canyon Preparation Hikes, Grand Canyon Tanner 4-day

Miscellaneous: CEC Retreat, NAD, Winter Music Concert

Semester 2:

ExEds: Soccer Co-Ed, Youth Detention Centre, African Chorus, Tech Lighting, Silk Road Ensemble, Music Improv, CEC Leadership Training, Wilderness First Aid,

Miscellaneous: AGORA, AWQ WorldQuest Competition, Buenos Para Todos Project Week, Spring Music Concert, CLAD, MIND, Blue Moon Café, Yule Ball, Graduation 2019

Semester 3:

ExEds: UWC FC, Volleyball, Residential Advisor, African Chorus, Dance Ensemble 1, Buenos Para Todos, Youth Global Citizen Exchange Program, Global Chorus Advanced Section, CEC Event Planning, Math Center, Tech Lighting

Miscellaneous: Colour Cultural Showcase, CEC Retreat, AGORA, Winter Dance Concert, Winter Music Concert, Spring Awakening, New Moon Café,

Semester 4:

ExEds: UWC FC, Volleyball, Residential Advisor, African Chorus, Dance Ensemble 2, Buenos Para Todos, Youth Global Citizen Exchange Program, Global Chorus Advanced Section, CEC Event Planning, Math Center

Miscellaneous: Memory Cultural Showcase, AWQ WorldQuest Competition, Yule Ball, Graduation 2020

I. IDENTIFICATION OF STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR PERSONAL GROWTH

In September 2018, I was asked to choose my first ExEds at UWC-USA which I did based on two factors: On the one hand my projected performance in that ExEd, and on the other hand my interest in the content of the ExEd. Back then, I was not really reflecting on the underlying reasons behind my intuitive choices but throughout my first year I noticed that I was mostly partaking in activities that I was already good at or among the better ones within that activity. I have been playing football since I can walk and had some form of experience in almost every (common European) team sport, I have been drumming or rather engaging with rhythms since being a toddler, and I had been singing in a choir more or less professionally supervised at my previous school while also being percussionist in my city's youth orchestra. Besides academic competences and knowledge, my pre-UWC acquired strengths all evolved around music and sport. While a former teacher once attested me that I am "good at talking", that talking had been limited to mostly academic or "sophisticated" conversations about politics, economics, and societal issues. These "pre-UWC strengths" could each be allocated to one of my Semester 1-ExEds:

rhythms and musical dynamics – Percussion Ensemble, Silk Road Ensemble Percussion Section

strong athletics, solid football technique, basic volleyball skills – Football (Soccer Co-ed), Volleyball

ability to sight-read, hold pitch, and comprehend choir dynamics – African Chorus

One of the skills I had that I was not aware of was the ability to play drums in an ensemble which I had never really succeeded at (and because of that not done very often). Peer-pressured by my second-years to choose Music Improv over Volleyball and YEP happening at the same time half-way through the semester, I suddenly found that I was pretty good at improvising accompaniment on drums and really enjoying it as well. From that point on, I ended up joining Music Improv more often than volleyball and dropped the active sessions part of YEP.

As mentioned above, I was not really aware of the fact that I was mostly enjoying and partaking at those activities that had a large common area of required competencies and/or knowledge with my pre-UWC strengths. This lack of reflection also meant that I did not even think of identifying and pursuing areas of personal growth and concepts like the comfort zone. In retrospect, I had a myriad of areas of personal growth ranging from social/inter-personal skills to artistic expression to leadership behaviour to awareness of issues. As well within the "areas of strength", music and sports, I was lacking experiences as a band member, a choir member in a non-Western European style, in Balkan and Arab percussion, and engaging with the full range of skills within one football team without a competitive priority.

These few identified areas of personal growth are representative for the wide range of potential directions I can or could have grown in. While contemplating over this learning outcome, I

came to the conclusion that, for me, a list would never be able to encompass “everything”, i.e. every potential aspect of my personality and my experiential education experience that could constitute an area of personal growth. Furthermore, this leads to the point that every aspect of one’s life can be an area of growth. As a finishing thought for this section, a potential characterization of the ExEd-Program at UWC-USA should contain the point that by participating in any form, one inherently is forced to engage with areas of personal growth and hence, that the program has a catalyzing effect on personality development.

II. CHALLENGES AND ACQUISITION OF SKILLS

When being asked about the purpose of CAS or ExEd, I often default to the aspect of growth and expanding one's zones of comfort, skills, and knowledge. For me, ExEd has played a catalyzing as well as contributing role in this aspect. On the one hand, ExEds have been the place for me where I could practice personal skills (such as good leadership, being a good learner, being a good listener, etc.). While still being institutionally supported, the fact that most of them were student-led and organized lead to a feeling of freedom which forced me to make own choices of behaviour (opposing to guided behaviour such as behaving well in a classroom) and then also engage with the consequences. Here I am not necessarily referring to ExEd-specific behaviour (such as passing a ball), but rather general traits and conduct in an official, but unguided setting.

On the other hand, I have learned new aspects and elements of existing pools of knowledge as well as entirely new sets of knowledge and experiences. I was pushed to the limits of my capabilities of reflection and culture-building during my CEC Leadership. Dancing, be it in Dance Ensemble or skits for shows, very often left my self-confidence and comfort with my body movement shattered into pieces (it took me almost 6 months to look into the mirror while dancing), but I made progress and was given the experience of transitioning from Dance Ensemble 1 to Dance Ensemble 2 in the last weeks before leaving campus which constitutes one of the biggest achievements of my UWC-USA time in my emotional perception.

III. COMMITMENT AND PERSEVERANCE IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGES

My biggest general challenge with the ExEd program, also one of the inherent problems of any time-limited program for teenagers, is the following paradox: The more and the better the program offers, the harder it gets for participants to feel satisfied. At UWC-USA, there are so many ExEds and activities offered that all would fall under the “Oh my god this is so amazing”-description that it is very hard to maintain a physically and mentally healthy schedule without feeling like not “making the best” of the opportunity and privilege simply attending the school offers. In my experience, this resulted in a first year where I ended up not being able to maintain a healthy sleep and exercise schedule due to not having regular time during the day for both social and academic experience. Contrasting, in my second year, I managed to find a fairly healthy work-sleep balance (where ExEds would fall under the work part of the day) which then was at the cost of a healthy social life. In both years, I overloaded myself with too many commitments and, despite in the end honoring a surprisingly large majority of them, had to concede significant aspects of my life. It is interesting and important to mention here that I almost never was considering giving up on something or dropping an ExEd because of that ExEd itself. Moreover, it was the load of my experiential education as a whole that was forcing me to prioritize certain commitments.

However, I am far from claiming that I did not face challenges within my ExEds. Adding on to the point made in Section I, the multiplicity of areas of growth also constitutes a multiplicity of challenges. The difference though, is the nature of each concept. While an area of growth only represents a potential for action and development, a challenge almost always results in one’s responsibility and duty in overcoming it when one strives to optimize the general experience and does not want to give up. The challenges I concretely faced, ranging from dealing with material shortage in football to reconciling deep conflicts within leaderships to overcoming my own comfort behaviours and attitudes to attending two or three ExEds at the same time, at several points made me doubt fundamental choices I made about myself and my life at several points.

Something seemingly simple, yet so important, I have learnt about myself after dealing with these challenges is the observation that I developed a very rich and constructive set of communication skills and competencies to support others dealing with challenges. Applying that same set to my own challenges, regardless of their congruency with the challenges of others, to a full extent has proven to be closer to impossible than easy. I still have not been able to explain to myself where the cause of this phenomenon lies for me, but I think it has something to do with my tendency of trusting my intuition when addressing challenges. I.e., I act mostly based on my instincts when being subjected to stress or a challenge in general, which seems to work most of the times, rather than doing the more rational analysis I apply when trying to facilitate others finding their approaches to their challenges.

IV. THE PROCESS OF (COMMUNITY) BUILDING

The theme of transition and (institutional) change was not just present but further defining and essential throughout my UWC-USA experience. Numerous times I was part of a group that had to face the need of (re-)building some aspect of the community, or I wanted to initiate something myself. Whether it was the vision of an inclusive and fair football ExEd after having one year of both lacking (second-year leaders) and destructive (external coach) leadership, or the vision of inspiring some positive change in the general campus culture around controversies and disagreements (AGORA), or the vision of elevating the Bartos Constructive Engagement of Conflict program to be a community wide tool for creating spaces of comfort and openness as well as providing and exploring ways to engage almost any kind of conflict and challenge constructively and collaboratively, one thing all these approaches had in common was the great amount of motivation and ideas of the engaged people to do good. While this might be a bit far-taken interpretation, this to me sometimes felt like the “sense of idealism” that our UWC mission proclaims. What was sometimes missing were the tools to realize that idealism because the success of these visions relied too much on the people with the ideas being able to put them into action. Some might call me naïve here, but I strongly believe that none of the people who were later identified to be responsible for the failure of parts or the whole vision, e.g. by not being able to honour commitments or mis-execute ideas, were lacking motivation and/or energy when promising the latter.

I have found this realization of idealism and its sometimes directly following disappointment to be one of the biggest challenges for myself in my transition to become a (mature) adult. I had to acknowledge at several points that, especially at such a multi-faceted place like UWC, ideas of community systems will always have to be subject to a constant process of revision and feedback from that same community in order to be successful. Once these ideas lose touch with the ever-changing reality in one aspect, the whole concept suddenly is prone to collapse. The other aspect that to me seems to cause most “failures” of realizing idealisms was the lack of institutional guidance combined with a conceived institutional attitude and commitment to namely provide that guidance to the largest extent possible. Despite probably being successful and even creativity-catalysing, the UWC-USA model of building experiential education in my opinion is too reliant on individuals (both adults and students) to be exceptional (with the standards of a UWC campus, not a “normal” institution which would not be sufficient here).

However, the setbacks I experienced rarely outweighed the success of the same or other visions in the long run. With the Global Citizen Exchange Program with the Council on International Relations in Santa Fe (SFCIR), I had helped building the program in Santa Fe during my internship at SFCIR and then on campus was dealing with the fact that the program originally was intended for “regular” students in New Mexico (which seemed to not be enough to engage the average UWC student). After the first semester though, my co-leader (who I did not really let space to do much in the first semester because I was not really aware of their role) and me made some effort to create a

UWC-specific component and structure to the program which probably would have resulted in some long term success but could not really be implemented due to the sudden departure from campus and the prohibition of group meetings in New Mexico.

V. COLLABORATIVE WORKING

The term “collaborative working” in my previous school was a symbol for the “modern” pedagogue and was often looked down upon by both students and teachers as this unrealistic hippie thing. This being the connotation of “collaborative working” before coming to UWC, I have to smile now when thinking about how my attitude has changed. To me, the key to understand collaborative working without successfully(!) experiencing it oneself (given one does not understand it intuitively) is to clarify the common misconception that it constitutes an “easier” process compared to the individualistic approach that is dominating Western education otherwise. To put it bluntly: Successful collaborative work requires the commitment of all collaborators to become one constructively operating thinking and doing organism. That sounds more dramatic than what it actually comes out to be (as it might trigger the “oh my god this is communism”-section) and essentially also is a key principle in individualistic approaches to education and/or life (in that case the “organism” is just given by the individual).

One more leap of thought: the problem that the average individualistic Western person faces in successfully working collaboratively is to make oneself vulnerable to the group and to some extent to the public. This may not be a requirement of successful collaborative work but it does ease the working process most of the times. Trust requires vulnerability. Humility requires vulnerability. Sharing responsibilities leads to perceived vulnerability. The perceived lack of control of the outcome leads to a perceived vulnerability towards the stakeholders and judges of the working project. I had and sometimes still have to become comfortable with these vulnerabilities and (mis-) conceptions of collaborative working to now be an advocate of making it a priority to offer collaborative working at least as an equally “valid” concept from early stages of education on because I think, if done constructively, the results yielded are more holistic and qualitatively better, especially in the area of building communities and societies and making decisions for these same groups.

At UWC-USA, I experienced collective leadership, collective organization, collective drafting and writing of community wide letters and proposals, and collective decision-making (sometimes referred to as “democratic”). Often the “collaboration” was created by one member of the community voicing an idea others either also possessed or were inspired and convinced by, and then those people coming together and debating for long periods of times until in the last moments of such meetings concrete action steps were decided. But I also experienced the more structured approach where it was institutionally suggested or even required to address an issue or challenge collaboratively. In these cases, I sometimes experienced the, for me, UWC-specific happiness when the idealism, experience, and expertise of people came together and produced one of the “amazing” projects or concepts we as a UWC community appreciate ourselves for.

VI. ENGAGEMENT WITH ISSUES OF GLOBAL SIGNIFICANCE

UWC is sometimes described as a microcosm of the world. Using a similar approach, I would argue that every issue one deals with during their UWC time is an issue “of global significance”. Here I would define global significance through the factor whether the issue is present globally (which is the case with most issues in a community with people from about 100 different countries and probably a bunch more cultures). Of course, one could take a more social scientific approach and define global significance through its global relevance and extent to which issues are shared across borders or continents. With both lenses, experiential education at UWC-USA offers a lot in almost all of its aspects. While sometimes one has to reflect on their actions to achieve that “global significance”, it also can appear fairly straightforward, e.g. when discussing global political challenges with local high school students and former members of the U.S. foreign service (Global Citizen Exchange Program).

When comparing these forms of engagement, I would argue that the more meaningful and more present interaction of every individual of the UWC-USA community happens through the engagement with each other. In experiential education these interactions then become abnormal when compared to “everyday”-interactions in their nature since ExEds can assume any shape or form. The value of “global significance” hereby is rooted in the atmosphere that is omnipresent yet nuanced throughout activities that can be classified as experiential education. That atmosphere can be characterized as open, constructive, and supportive as well as always striving for optimization of procedure and results, and probably in this form can only be created having such a diverse (culturally and person-wise) body of participants as UWC. Acting, learning, and making decisions in that atmosphere constitutes “global significance” since it is truly dealing with a global spectrum of potential thoughts and actions.

VII. REFLECTIONS ON THE ETHICS OF CHOICES

Right now, being in the transition phase between teen-age, high school life to “mature”, adult university and work life, the power of choosing feels like the key indicator in growing up. The awareness that one not just is able to, but also sometimes has to make choices on their own (without e.g. institutional guidance or advice) and then may even be solely responsible for the consequences of these choices is a trait that is essential in being mature. In experiential education, especially in positions of partial or full leadership, I had the opportunity to observe myself trying to be that kind of mature. Especially in my second year, I made choices, consciously and intuitively, that affected the lives of others as well as my own, and I became a bit closer to be aware of the weight on your mental back that these decisions become. I have yet to figure out whether I want to trust my “gut feeling” or rationally analyse situations by abstracting myself. Both for me has worked well and failed. If I have to figure out which one or which dose of each would be “good” for each situation, how do I make that choice?

The other aspect of choices that challenged me was my lack of clear and consistent priorities for most of my time at UWC-USA. My personality and ways of thinking was evolving and changing so rapidly at times, that I could not even predict how I would choose month ahead or explain how I chose one month ago. While I had my core values that were fairly consistent throughout the last year of UWC, my interpretations and applications of those changed and evolved from each situation. I am not sure whether this constant development and change should be something I strive for in the years to come because of a number of factors for which, surprise, I am not able to prioritise consistently. First, I acknowledge that the personality change I have experienced is probably the biggest gain or improvement from UWC-USA thinking egoistically. Second, I am afraid of not being able to make “right” long term decisions because I cannot predict changing perceptions of my core values. Third, I simply do not know how I want to feel when making a decision. What I mean by this is the array of potential states of decision-making: confident, hopeful, insecure, guessing, intuitive, carpe diem, etc.. And lastly, there is the aspect of potential consequences on my environment (the most important and underlying for the prior ones as well as my priorities): How far can I “test” my decision-making to figure out the most effective and healthy process for me in the long run without putting my then current environment at risk of being subject to some form of despotism?

VIII. THE ROLE OF PRIVILEGE AND POWER

For this section I want to differentiate between two sets of privileges for me: The privileges that come with attending UWC-USA and are mostly applicable to all members of its community, and the privileges that I was born with and I gained throughout my life that are specific to me. Starting with the latter, I was only made aware at UWC-USA what it means to be born in one of the safest and wealthiest countries as a white man. Wanted or not, these traits already give me enough power and privilege to potentially have a fairly eased pathway towards later stages of self-actualization and life success. The combination of seeing difference in my surrounding as well as being invited and helped to reflect upon “these things”, for me, is a unique experience of UWC-USA. Especially the CEC program and the events under its premise (Annual Conference, MLK Day have left me with a vastly increased awareness and feeling of responsibility to use my privilege to inspire and create the best possible change for everyone in this world. I believe that it takes strength to constantly act on this idealistic statement, and, if I am not able to hold up to this commitment, I might destroy myself mentally at later stages in life. But if I succeed to any extent, it is largely due to the overwhelming force of my experiential education at UWC-USA and the motivation it has inspired in me from time to time again. On a slightly different note, I also am not completely comfortable making “one should”-statements here because I have also learned to believe that everyone’s specific circumstances can be so nuanced and complex that generalized statements would not serve a great purpose here.

The second type of privilege is probably one of the biggest challenges of UWC-USA as an institution on a local level. For example the following question: Where should its leadership draw the line between striving to employ New Mexico’s resources towards UWC students and striving to act upon the “UWC spirit” and mission to not disadvantage the local community through its actions? I have personally dealt with this type of conflict through the AWQ WorldQuest Competition where my team has participated and won at the local level in both years of my UWC-USA time. Quite literally, UWC-USA is a New Mexican high school and therefore entitled to participate at the New Mexico state level of that competition. However, the prize to be won, a full expensed trip to Washington D.C. including meeting industrial and political leaders, could constitute an equalizing effect on the already dire reality of New Mexican education and its lack of equal opportunity internally as well as compared to other states. More general, UWC-USA’s role in New Mexico can be very ambivalent in its impact on the local community and in my opinion has to be evaluated every single time a member of the UWC-USA community engages with “the outside”.

Another dynamic of privilege and power is the aspect of simply attending UWC-USA. Does and should one have the responsibility to act “upon the mission” because of the (opportunity) costs that were paid by others for one to attend? And does the answer to this question change based upon other privileges?

IX. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE

Some of the aspects to be discussed regarding community engagement and service I already touched upon in the previous section. Therefore, I will focus on my personal experience in this section.

When I was presented the choices available in my Orientation 2018, the Youth Detention Centre (YDC) ExEd appeared to be one of the most meaningful ones regarding UWC-USA's impact on the community and after I made my way into the ExEd, I would describe my one year engagement in it as very exhausting but rewarding. Probably the most meaningful experience I had was during my internship over the summer break at the Santa Fe Council on International Relations. There, I also got involved with the Global Citizen Exchange Program which was a very contrasting, because serving rather than gaining, experience to the Bueno Para Todos ExEd which were my only two regular community interactions in my second year.

A theme that was constantly present throughout these interactions was the process of figuring out what role I was supposed to and willing to play. There were questions of authority and organizing superiority as well as questions of respect and thoughtfulness towards the outside community and I mostly was prevented from getting closure to these questions due to the sudden end of my time at UWC-USA.

X. MY PERCEIVED SHORTCOMINGS OF THE UWC-USA EXED PROGRAM

I perceive myself as the devil's advocate when it comes to evaluating systems and programs. Therefore, I want to include my perceived shortcoming of the UWC-USA ExEd Program in this portfolio to also account for that part of my experience. I will not elaborate with concrete examples to each point since I do not want to provide a distorted image of situations on campus by picking one out of many. However, I urge the reader, given they have had experience with the UWC-USA ExEd Program, to reflect a bit on potential applications of the following rather abstract descriptions and claims.

First, in my opinion and experience the program has relied too much on the effort and exceptionality of individuals to close the gap between expectations and hopes of mostly students but also sometimes "adults" (non-students) and reality. These individuals could be adults in key positions, or engaged students committing extra time, who go beyond their responsibilities and "normal" workload to realize a vision or an idea of themselves or someone else. While during operation such system models can excel and produce exceptional results due to the inherent and intrinsic motivation all protagonists have to showcase, they are prone to the following disadvantages: Some ideas might be disproportionately supported based on the person having it, despite an acknowledgeable effort of those engaged supporters to be just and give everyone equal treatment, there will always be some form of discrimination towards people either not being comfortable approaching someone or not being heard because of numerous potential reasons. Furthermore, once these supporting individuals have left the institution, programs and systems might be prone to failure or operate in unintended and ineffective ways because they were relying on these individuals to run them and keep them together. Lastly, for these individuals, this can lead to an overscheduled and unhealthy working routine since their engagement is not institutionally guided and supported. "Fixing" this shortcoming might turn out to be rather difficult since UWC attracts extraordinarily engaged staff and student, but I would recommend on the one hand to streamline the support of creative ideas for programs and system changes by including it in a job description and communicating that to the community and on the other hand to manifest working systems on campus that run mostly based on the engagement of individuals in institutional frameworks.

Second, students and employees are overloaded with the offered experiential education. There are multiple causes of this phenomenon such as lacking limitations on ExEd times or lacking limits for total hours of ExEd offered based on the number of students and employees on campus. The consequences of this overscheduling can be seen in the detrimental effects of induced stress on mental health illnesses as well as the common phenomenon of sleep deprivation and inability of students to submit qualitative work on time both academically and in ExEd. I believe that there are two approaches to the problem of overscheduling that can be used in isolation as well as combined. On the one hand, the offer can be reduced which would most likely lead to less total

time spent in ExEd which might have negative effects on experiences but more likely will deepen the commitment to remaining ExEd time. Additionally, more time would be available for social life, sleep, and academic work. The second approach is less tangible and unclear in its effectiveness. It is to offer more support for students and employees to build healthy skills of time management and self-care as well as offering the same amount of ExEd in “smarter” ways, i.e. guiding community members to not overload themselves as well find balances between recreational and challenging/exhausting ExEd. In my opinion the latter approach constitutes the more beneficial long-term results if executed successfully. Such skills of time management and self-care are beneficial, if not essential for further education and work life for all members of the community additional to the improved experience during ExEd due to increased productivity and health.

These two points are my main concerns that I felt needed to be mentioned in this framework of my ExEd portfolio, I again want to stress the need to apply examples to these points in order to find constructive solutions if the reader chooses to put effort into addressing the identified shortcomings.

XI. REFLECTIONS: CULTURAL DAY SHOWS

Cultural day shows were a consistent highlight throughout my time at UWC-USA. They combined technical improvisation and expertise, artistic genius and expression, and were unique mixtures of the above and hundreds of aspects of cultures and personalities around the world. I personally mostly engaged with them through my activity in Tech Lighting where I could “live out” my fascination and appreciation for technology as well as my perfectionism. For MIND, the last cultural show of my first year and the last cultural show themed by regions, I experienced one of the greatest feelings of successes I ever had with a performance despite not being on stage until the very last seconds of the show where the tech crew was honoured. It was the combination of having the freedom and responsibility to make decisions on our own and directly perceiving the impact of what we were doing down on stage and in the audience. I could let the exploring, curious, and experimental (one might say playfully childish) side of me improvise lighting configurations to meet specific expectations of performers and ourselves. What also stood out to me was the emptiness I felt after cleaning up and hearing an amazed and convinced audience that “it was the best show of the year”. It was only a week but I grown to become so passionate and comfortable being in the tech booth that I suddenly was severely “missing” being there the next days.

Then, for my second year, our “cultural leaders”, chosen students who committed themselves to designing and shaping the representation and celebration of the countless cultures on campus, designed a form of showcase that was not centred around regions anymore, but rather themes that all cultures could speak to and showcase.

Colour was my last show as a member of tech, and I now experienced additional to the described elements of MIND the side of being a performer on stage (I had performed in skits in each CLAD and NAD the year before but as part of ensembles and was not “really a part of the show”). I performed the first dance in my life, and I had a lot of fun during rehearsals and performances. Yet, it did not feel as great and festive as MIND, and the new themed showcase was also still not close to be optimized in its execution.

Then came Memory and I have to admit that there almost could not have been a greater ending to my life at UWC-USA (five days later, first-years were told to leave campus, and seven days later, second-years had to leave as well). I was not a member of tech anymore but now I got to experience the performer’s side of the show to the full extent. It was also a show very representative for a UWC-USA cultural day show for me. During the two weeks of rehearsals I was going through the worst mental health crisis I have had in my life and I was very close to dropping out of the show just three days before the final performance due to the stress the countless rehearsals were inducing in me. The reason I would deem it representative is because of the fact that from a rational perspective, I should not have done it (I also had trial exams the next week AND the AWQ WorldQuest competition during the rehearsal time for which I had probably equal amount of study

time as for final exams) and if you would have asked me for a prediction regarding the success of trying to do it, I would have been pretty pessimistic. Additionally, most of my co-performers and organizers were in similar situations (trials, stress, etc.). But we somehow managed to pull off a great production that was equally good as a whole if not better than the highlights of MIND.

XII. REFLECTIONS: EVENT PLANNING AND AGORA

Similar to the opportunity of being a Tech Lighting member and being “playfully childish” in dealing with technology, I experience great joy and satisfaction solving organizational and planning tasks. Because of a number of (lucky) circumstances I ended up helping to create, organize, and execute the UWC-USA Orientation schedule 2019 and I was greatly rewarded by it because I finally felt like I had a purpose and I could see the direct impact of what I did. In general, I would describe my activities as a member of planning and organizing teams as exhausting but rewarding ones. Through CEC Event Planning as well as the “regular” CEC leadership programme I got to experience “the other side” of multiple aspects of education. I learned not just the challenges but also surprises along the ways of organizing and then executing events and programmes.

On a slightly different note, I was part of a student group, called AGORA, that was striving to create and catalyse a more constructive culture around controversies and disagreements. In this context, we had to carefully identify and evaluate events and measurement that would have actual effects on this mindset and behaviours of people which constituted a significant challenge since none of us had prior experience in building this type of skillset within a community.

XIII. REFLECTIONS: UNITED WORLD COLLEGE FOOTBALL CLUB (UWC FC)

The UWC FC project or vision was one of the biggest projects I was a significant part of. At the beginning of my second year, we had 11 football leaders all motivated and full of ideas to rebuild the football programme almost from scratch. We had chased our former external coach away because we perceived him to be sexist, prejudiced, and to some extent incompetent as a football coach. High on that success we committed ourselves to a vision of an inclusive and rewarding UWC-USA football programme that would give all players space to play, have fun, and grow. We debated for hours how we would ensure to bring across our main message of being inclusive towards players with lower skill levels and girls (we identified those two groups as those commonly discriminated in regular football practices/activities). For me as a co-leader and one of the leading voices in actually realizing our project and ideas I got to experience the difficulties of unguided collective leadership. None of us had prior experience in coaching football, none of us had experience in building community around football, and none of us really could guarantee that our ideas were realistic and appropriate to our identified issues. I decided for myself to try playing the role of a thoughtful listener who would try to reconcile and harmonize conflict within our leadership groups rather than debating until defeating “the other side”. Throughout the year, we experienced countless setbacks, and almost broke apart at several points. While the reasons would be meaningful for trying to execute a similar project again, they are also too individual and specific to people to give account here. One could summarize them as a trend among leaders to prioritize other leaderships/activities as well as the lack of a regular feedback and improvement mechanism to our project as whole.

Within the ExEd we experienced lack of interest and willingness of participants to commit to our vision or simply the inability of some players act upon their commitment. We also faced the challenge of not having an authority that was respected by all players which lead to sometimes chaotic or even cancelled practices. The day before the “Second-Year vs. First-Year Football Match”, the biggest highlight and almost sole competition throughout the year for the football ExEd, we were on the brink of some players boycotting the game because of severe miscommunication and lack of thoughtfulness of myself. This was partially due to the fact that I basically organized the game on my own, and that I was not committing an appropriate amount of time to reflecting on the overall state of the ExEd. In the end, I think I managed to use the power and responsibility in a way to make it an enjoyable experience for everyone which was a big relief to me. However, this was only a partial success since in the second semester we had to come together multiple times and pledge ourselves over and over again to keep fighting for our common goal of inclusiveness. In that period of time, I had to concede my role in the ExEd to some extent since I was also not able to prioritize coming to practice regularly enough. I faced an internal conflict, where I was blaming myself for not holding up to my commitment but also debating whether I still should “have the right” to give opinions on the future of the ExEd since I was not an active member anymore. We

also permanently lost many players due to a lack of team spirit and the exact inclusiveness we were striving for. Unfortunately, we never got to finally reconcile our bitterness with the current situation that was definitely existing within our leadership. Right before we had to leave campus, there were several voices saying we should cancel the ExEd completely which in my opinion would constitute giving up on our vision. I was not willing to do that, and enough of the other leaders also committed to a more thoughtful transition from our leadership to the next year's. We will see what happens then.

Overall, I have learned a number of lessons as a leader and person in a position of making decisions impacting quite a bunch of people, and a lot of the reflections in the above sections were largely influenced by my "UWC FC" experience.

XIV. REFLECTIONS: BUENOS PARA TODOS (BPT)

I was introduced to the BPT community during my first year project week and after that week noticed how hard it was for me to leave. BPT was one of the places in my UWC world where I knew I could go and just be myself (the “CEC Spirit” was there, see next section). First, it provided me with a very recreational and rewarding form of physically working (out) which I later found again through the Wednesday morning campus service. During my time there however, it also grew to be a space where I could safely be myself and also share my thoughts and reflections. Additionally, engaging with indigenous traditions and adaptation to “modern” life and challenges was very rewarding for my own personal growth. Simply through listening and observing the approaches at BPT to challenges to indigenous life like climate change and industrialization invited me to challenge a lot of my Westernized beliefs that I, and the entire Western system of beliefs and fundamentals, had thought to be inevitable. Another healthily challenging aspect was the matriarchal and feminist nature of BPT, where I as a male figure was given the opportunity to find my place through very respect- and thoughtful behaviour and in the end also was given the space to reflect on aspects of my (male) identity.

Despite time-wise only comprising very few days of my experiential education, I would describe BPT as one of its most essential and experience-shaping elements.

XV. REFLECTIONS: CEC

Note: This reflection is in form of a letter to “the CEC spirit” and might have a confusing effect on the reader due to a drastic change in tone compared to other sections.

Dear CEC Spirit,

for the things you have done to me, I could wish to eradicate you. But I could also wish to put you on the highest altar I can find and praise you for the rest of my life. You were the only place where I knew I would feel like being myself and speaking without having to put energy into adapting my communication to my environment. You also crushed my heart into pieces time and time again because you tore down all the walls and defenses I had to protect it from the dire realities of my life. I fell in love with the people that made me feel like being with you and I fell in love with you. I still cannot talk or write about you without feeling my soul crumble and wanting to burst into tears and throw myself into your caring arms. But let’s start from the beginning:

The first time I got to know you was way before I started trying to be a good person. It was way before I tried reflecting about me and my behaviour on a regular basis. It was the first-year CEC retreat where you enabled me to realize for the first time probably since I was 11 years old, that and how much I care for people and my own life. You enabled me to deeply connect and share with people that were not even acquaintances, and some would stay acquaintances long after. You made it possible that I poured out my soul and I was not punished for it but rather rewarded in the form of physical and mental hugs and the vulnerability of others that made me feel welcome and equal. After arriving back on campus and going hiking in the Grand Canyon for a week, I kind of forgot how exactly you managed to convince me, I only remember that I promised myself to become a CEC leader instead of doing what I would have naturally done at that point, and pursue wilderness which was sports, outdoors, and leadership combined (all things I loved and thought I was great at at that point).

It was that promise that I remembered and that then, half a year and a bunch of interactions with amazing, inspiring people later, resulted in me trying to overthrow so many aspects of my personality and adapted behaviours that I identified to be bad for myself, but mostly my environment. It was through the CEC training that I really discovered that I actually care way more for the well-being of others than my own. In that process of trying to find back to “myself”, which I now thought to be the caring, listening, and selfless version of me, you were the source of energy that kept me going.

It was at the second-year retreat where I for the first time had a last time of UWC-USA. I could not make myself go towards the bus that was bringing us CEC leaders back to campus. I could not imagine returning to a reality on campus that was draining, stressful, and full of new sources of stress and harm. I knew I was going to lose people on campus that I would have never lost if you would have been there. Instead, I was crawling through the empty rooms that I had helped clean the last couple

hours and tried finding hope in my head. Hope, that at least some people carried the atmosphere from the evening before into their “normal” lives on campus. Hope, that I would at least once again in my life would be at a place where I felt understood and appreciated without having to subordinate myself to my environment. Hope, that more and more people would understand how powerful it would be if you would be allowed to exist on campus. Hope, that my closest friends would never abandon me and you completely. I could not find these hopes back then. I just built another wall around my heart and watched my heart freeze inside on the way back to campus.

Until now, very few parts of these hopes have been fulfilled. Until now, I have been craving for places and people that reminded me of you. Until now, I have tried describing and recommending you to people but unfortunately, it might be the case that you are only that special to me.

And then, at the furthest corner of my idealistic and utopian horizon in my mind, I want to bring you to the rest of the world (but how if “not even” a UWC campus can keep you longer than an evening??) because I believe that your principles could be the basis of a peaceful world. And if not a world, because it might be too late to save it, then communities and households. Maybe I am being completely ignorant here. Maybe I am just weird and humans actually cannot live with you. Maybe because they need destruction. Or they need fights and (harmful) conflict. Or we just don’t have the strength to manage to let you in our lives constantly. Because I know how much it can (temporarily) cost to do so. But I have seen it done, even with people who absolutely could not imagine themselves appreciating you or wanting to chase you away.

On a finishing note, thank you! You are what made my UWC time the most meaningful time of my life. You created the only place I know where there is always potential for peace and harmony. You made it possible for me to experience my lowest lows and then, just in time, pulled me high again. You were there for me every time I managed to find you and/or someone invited you. Thank you!

Until we meet again...