

REFLECTIVE ESSAY: ADVENTURES IN RESEARCH

By Brii Brennan

As a student in the Faculty of Adventure, Culinary Arts and Tourism, Research opportunities weren't even on my radar. Research was an unknown and seemingly inaccessible option for me. I felt that being involved with research was similar to being a Ph.D. student or a Masters' student, that it was an entity all on its own and not something to do in collaboration. That is to say; my path has been different to a typical university student; I started at Thompson Rivers University as a mature student almost a decade after graduating from Randolph Academy for the Performing Arts. Yet, despite my Musical Theatre diploma and experience, most career aspirations require a degree. So, before my involvement with the research office, I had a clear plan to get in, get my degree, and get out.

Flash forward to a guest lecturer during my first semester at TRU, and I got to peek behind the curtain of research from a tourism perspective. Safe to say, I was hooked. Since then, I have been a Research Assistant, Research Work-Study participant, Research Apprentice, two-time Research Ambassador, a Community-Engaged Research Fellow and have taken every opportunity to connect with research in the classroom. As a kid, I always asked 'why' and was made to feel like my inquisitiveness was annoying but stepping into the world of research has allowed me not only the chance of exploring my curiosity but the support and encouragement to dive deeper.

Over my past few years at Thompson Rivers University, one thing is for sure, my research interests have constantly evolved and grown. Research is never just the surface view; you quickly realize that the topic or question you strategically and critically thought out is surprisingly broad when you start researching. When you think you have narrowed in on the core components, you find another layer and level of investigating, which typically can change your original idea altogether. For example, I started with an interest in agritourism, or agriculture tourism, which is taking the farm to the city or the city to the farm, such as picking your own apples or farmers' markets, which draws on a connection to food, place and community. Agritourism led me down a path researching food tourism, culinary tourism, connection to place, community-engaged research, community-based initiatives, food sovereignty and sustainability, food culture, and most recently, the impact of a global pandemic on tourism. Specifically, I started with the idea of the pandemic being the disruption that created an opportunity for local tourism to boom. Covid-19 halting tourism worldwide had a significant impact on my chosen discipline. However, travel has been around for centuries and won't be disappearing anytime soon, but it does need to adjust to the restrictions and level of safety moving forward.

My research activities have the opportunity to set local communities up for success during these challenging times. However, like all research, the more questions I asked, the more questions I had. While I focused my demographic on the Canadian context and specifically British Columbia as a sample group, the actual question I was trying to answer began to evolve. I began to look at Canadians' level of welcomeness towards visitors. Considering Canada is a stereotypically friendly demographic, you would be welcoming, but that was not the case. From a tourism discipline, I

was focusing on boosting their businesses, but tourism involves two parts, the visitors, and the hosts. I wasn't considering that the hosts might not be feeling very hospitable during the current world climate. To have a successful tourism experience, both the visitors and the hosts need to be happy with the agreement. If one side of the equation is hostile, the whole experience will fall apart.

Being involved with research since my first semester as one of the few students in a creative discipline instead of the more typical academic and scientific research was an exciting opportunity and gave me a unique perspective. In addition, my curiosity in lifelong learning and natural personability allowed me to thrive in the research environment and open up new opportunities at TRU. While my first year as a Research Ambassador was very different from previous years, due to the pandemic putting all learning virtual, it allowed for an unexpected journey into the world of WordPress. During my first year as a co-creator on the Canadian Undergraduate Research Network (CURN), I populated content on the Student Tab and unpacked what Knowledge Translation and Mobilization means. When the second year as a co-creator came about, I expanded my leadership skills and took on a more prominent role in developing CURN.

The skills I learned are invaluable and led to another opportunity to be a Community-Engaged Research Fellow (CERF) over the summer. The confidence boost in knowing my abilities have grown through research that I was able to qualify for and be a fellowship recipient is impressive. I further developed my teamwork skills through CERF and learned how to create and produce a

podcast. The basis of CURN is a network curated for students by students, which encourages the students to be co-creators. The trust and support I have received working in research have pushed me to do my best work now and in the future. I have been afraid to make mistakes because of the repercussions, the failure, the criticism, you name it, but it is the complete opposite in the world of research and my research journey. The only way to grow is to try something new, trial and error, explore the unknown, accept that life can and will go wrong, but that doesn't mean you messed up. Mistakes happen, and they tend to lead to the best discoveries. If I hadn't gotten involved in research, my experience at TRU would have been very different and, quite frankly, rather unfulfilling. I never thought of myself as qualified to be a researcher, but I do now. Research has taught me to lean into my curiosity and have confidence in my abilities.