

May 2021

"I Didn't Know What "S" Was, but I Learned to Love It."

Kathy Thornhill
kathy.thornhill@humboldt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/rr>

Recommended Citation

Thornhill, Kathy (2021) "I Didn't Know What "S" Was, but I Learned to Love It.," *Redwood Roots*: Vol. 2 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/rr/vol2/iss2/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons @ Humboldt State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Redwood Roots by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Humboldt State University. For more information, please contact kyle.morgan@humboldt.edu.



“I DIDN’T
KNOW WHAT
“S” WAS, BUT
I LEARNED TO
LOVE IT.”

By Kathy Thornhill

Kai Cooper did not plan to go to HSU. Cooper grew up in Arcata and expected to go to a different school far away from Humboldt. However, for a variety of reasons, HSU was where she went. Now, 4 years later, she cannot picture going anywhere else. HSU was different than she imagined, yet she found a home here in large part because she took a Service Learning course, INTL 100S, in her first semester at HSU. She picked the class because of its name, *Critically Thinking about Globalization*. She believed that it was supposed to be the first class she would take as an International Studies major. She found out later that it is not required for the major, but rather is a General Education course.

The course, taught by Dr. Alison Holmes, opened doors for Cooper through which she enthusiastically walked. “It is funny how that 100 class changed my whole experience at Humboldt State,” Cooper said. She did not know that the “S” after INTL100 meant it was a Service Learning class until Dr. Holmes explained how the class was different—that the students would be going out into the community. Cooper was excited and thought that because she had grown up here that she already knew the community; she felt like she had “a leg up.” She ended up volunteering at a place she had never heard of before,

U.S. Servas. "I was like, what? This place exists?" Cooper said. "It taught me that the school has connections with the community. I didn't know what "S" was, but I learned to love it."

"I think that [there was] one monumental moment that shifted my perspective...I was going to HSU, not really wanting to go there," Cooper said. "It was my hometown. All my friends moved away to go to college...it was my first class with Dr. Holmes. It was literally my first class, and she walks in and she's all, *Dr. Holmes*. I was like who is this lady? She is so cool and she's in *Humboldt*?"

Dr. Holmes turned out to be Cooper's advisor and has guided her throughout her time at HSU. Cooper acknowledges that having strong connections with faculty and staff at HSU have made a huge difference on how she views HSU. Cooper described Dr. Holmes as having "a spark" when she talked about Service Learning. Cooper found that same passion when she worked with staff from the Center for Community Based Learning (CCBL). "She really cares about her students," Cooper said. "I have found the same thing with CCBL. You are all gung-ho on helping students succeed. It's that passion that I really wanted to surround myself with. And I think that is why I stayed so involved with CCBL, no matter how I could, because I wanted to be surrounded by your passion."

Cooper has been involved with CCBL throughout her time at HSU. She participated in a focus group with CCBL staff and other Service Learning students in her first year. She served as a student representative on the CCBL Advisory Committee and has continued volunteering and/or working with the department. Cooper was instrumental in creating Redwood Roots magazine. She had several conversations with students and CCBL staff and the result was this magazine. "It was a group effort," Cooper said. "I don't take responsibility for that whatsoever. But I definitely feel it was something I pushed for and highlighted the importance of."

Cooper experienced herself how interconnected HSU and the local community are and wanted others to know as well. She felt that there are a lot of opportunities that people do not know about and that these amazing experiences are not being shared widely enough. It was important to her to do what she could to get the word out. She helped develop the magazine's name and scope, conducted interviews, wrote articles

for the magazine, and created a presence for Redwood Roots on Social Media.

A theme throughout Kai's college career and the advice she gives to students is to network and take advantage of the opportunities available. Cooper has always been outgoing and shares that helping her mom with demos and at craft fairs was "training in customer service since I was a kid." She did not recognize this as a skill until college. "I didn't realize I had a knack for networking before I came to HSU," Cooper said. "You just introduce yourself to people and you continue that contact." She went on to say, "Don't be afraid to get yourself out there and network. [HSU] is a lot more interconnected than you think it is. There are faculty who have been here for years and have networks established that you can benefit from by networking with that professor. You never know who you're going to meet and you never know what way experiences are going to go. Just go with it. I was invited to do a small one on one meeting and it resulted in a snowball effect of me here four years later doing an interview for a magazine that I helped start up. It comes full circle and you can learn from your experiences in ways that you have to take a step back and learn."

Dr. Holmes reflected on Kai's experience with Service Learning, CCBL and the creation of this magazine. "That publication would be a sizable achievement in its own right - but it also tells another story," Holmes said. "The story of a local kid who thought of 'here' as a bit small and perhaps constraining - but who literally lit up at the discovery there are so many doors she had never even seen before and even more exciting - that those doors could not only open her to the world out there - but to so many worlds within. She opens each new door with a spirit of adventure and we are all humbled to watch her sense of joy and wonder - and grateful to her for sharing her eyes through which we can see anew the amazing worlds that - perhaps always - have surrounded us."

Cooper graduates in May 2021 with a Political Science major with a concentration in Environment and Sustainability. She is also earning a minor in International Studies. She had been an International Studies major until COVID prevented her from studying abroad, a requirement for the International Studies major. It was a smooth transition for her because she was able to complete the remaining requirements for Political Science and she always had a great interest in the political science arena. For example, she has volunteered to

“I was invited to do a small one on one meeting and it resulted in a snowball effect of me here four years later doing an interview for a magazine that I helped start up.”

participate in Model United Nations, even though it was not required. Cooper plans to work in the public sphere for her career. “As someone who is loud and outgoing, I thought, I could use my voice in support of the environment,” Cooper said.

When asked what she is most proud of in her college career, she replied, “If it is not too cliché, I would say Redwood Roots becoming a real thing. I think that was really important for me being a local community member. I’ve understood the relationship that HSU and the community have with each other and so I really wanted to be able to amplify those voices.” She went on to say that getting the magazine up and running was just the first step. She has a vision for the magazine. “I see big things for the future of Redwood Roots...I hope to see print copies of Redwood Roots at newspaper stands for the entirety of Humboldt County to learn from.”

Kelly Fortner, Student Support Coordinator with CCBL, reflected on her experience working with Cooper, who she has known since the initial planning days of the magazine. “It has been such a joy working with Kai over the past few years. She brings such an energy and enthusiasm to the work we do in the Center for Community Based Learning and with Redwood Roots. She is always thinking about ways to create connections between others, especially between HSU and the local community. I know that after graduating Kai will go on to continue to inspire others and be a leader in whatever she does.”

