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Student ID

“Lauren, what are you majoring in?” is a more common question that I get asked from my family and friends than, “What are you learning?” My four years at Evergreen has been a meandering journey of intellectual, creative, and emotional growth.

Throughout elementary school in Southeast Asia, I learned to speak, read, and write in English, along with my native languages. Summer drawing classes honed my creative skills, which continue to serve as a bridge to every community that I am a part of.

At twelve years old in 2009, I immigrated to Alaska with my mom and younger brother to be reunited with my dad. Moving to a new country presented many obstacles and opportunities. In high school, I became fluent in English and achieved academic success, but became ashamed of my native languages and identity.

My complex experiences in Southeast Asia and Alaska provided the impetus for my dream to pursue higher education. As the eldest of three and a first generation student, I cautiously faced challenges and opportunities. Each experience paved my way towards holistic growth as a lifelong learner and a human being. I marveled at personal questions about the role of education in economic, physical, mental well-being, and freedom of marginalized peoples. The breadth of interdisciplinary programs during my first year launched me to question, learn, and understand familial and societal challenges. I grappled with concepts and theories deeper than I was capable of doing before. My research projects were firmly rooted in my lived-experiences as an immigrant, a first generation college student, and an artist raised in a low-income family. Having a fuller understanding of myself and my family helped me appreciate and strengthen my community.

The ability to think critically and link theory with practical applications to improve the conditions of my community, especially Alaska, was something that I was constantly thirsty for. Witnessing the ways that low-wage immigrant laborers in Alaska were unwittingly used by big corporations made me dream of more than just economic mobility for myself, my family, and my community.

As a working student, I applied economic theories in order to equitably steward students’ fees through our Services and Activities Fees board. While working as a writing tutor with TRiO and the Writing Center, I utilized composition theory to cultivate the voice of first generation and low-income students in their writing journeys. As an elementary classroom aide, second language theories, critical pedagogy, and arts-integrated curriculum informed my practices. I collaborated with the school’s ELL specialist, second grade teacher, and school principal to implement trauma-informed teaching and trainings for teachers, staff, and work study students.

Working collaboratively with my classmates and communities beyond the college expanded and nourished my learning. Completing my Individual Learning Contract (ILC) about immigrant laborers in Alaska I developed my capacity to engage with my community while also directing my own learning and research. During Teaching English Language Learners, I delve into a case study research with a fellow first generation college student and immigrant about the labor of our hands, tongue, and psyche. During my last quarter, I translated the years of research, seminars, writings, and work experiences into drawings and ceramic sculptures, which portrayed and honored the lives of people who matter the most in my journey.

These learning experiences continue to empower me to amplify my voice against oppression toward marginalized populations in public schools. My growing knowledge and understanding of theories, concepts, and ideas about the world propels me to move beyond fear and silence. Healing my own wounds from oppressive policies, beliefs, words, and practices have led me to reclaim my identity while also preventing others from being wounded. I am more self-reflective of what it means and feels like to learn and grow holistically. But above all else, my education