

Emma Irving, Widener University alum

It's been so great to hear from everybody so far, and yeah FUSE has been one of the coolest experiences that I've ever taken on. So I got to Widener in 2014 and I joined The Blue Route, our literary journal, right away. I was very excited to get involved and start reading and just really learning what a literary magazine was, because I didn't really know at the time. So I became the blog or social media manager my sophomore year and then the editor-in-chief my junior year. I stayed involved my senior year, but was president of another thing so my time was a little bit split, but I still did it the whole way through, Blue Route, and of course, being with FUSE.

So I gave a presentation when Widener hosted the conference in 2015, I was looking back on the conference archives earlier this morning, which was quite a throwback. But that was one of my first, I guess the first professional presentation that I gave at a conference, and really gave me confidence to, you know feel like I had something to say as an undergraduate editor, like Gabi was saying. So then in 2016, I remember going to Bowling Green for their conference. I remember Ally walking us around campus, and just like meeting everybody and having a blast. And I went to the AWP Conference for two years at Widener and I tabled for FUSE in 2017, and I remember I still have the business card of a woman who sat next to me at the table beside me. And I got to talking with her, and that was my first sort of foray into this scary world of networking which just ended up being talking to people, which FUSE really taught me.

So, since graduation, well, this starts actually at the AWP Conference in 2018. We were in Tampa, and I struck up a conversation with the head publisher of Green Writers Press, a small, independent, environmental press in Vermont. And I sent her my resume that afternoon, and then had an internship by that evening, it was our first day at the conference. We had driven down from Pennsylvania to Tampa to avoid a snowstorm, and then I, just by talking to somebody, had an internship that really set me off on my whole professional journey.

All of my friends went to grad school and my English major friends went to grad school, and that was not the path for me. It's like Jessica was saying, I needed some time, and I still haven't gone back, though I really love school. But I've come into a lot of really unique experiences because of this one internship.

So right away after I graduated, I started reading submissions for this internship. Basically, the internship was just reading submissions, sending rejections, it was pretty slow going at first, but then things started to build up. I got more projects, and more than that I got introduced to a cohort of people that I still keep in touch with now. And then, after a summer of interning I started to get paid to do my work, which was very exciting.

And I stayed with Green Writers Press for a number of years, I eventually became the Director of Digital Services, so working on eBooks, audiobooks, but also upping our accessibility in other areas of the press. And I also served as the Head Editor on three published titles: a nature journaling art book, a YA fantasy, and a caregiving memoir. So I got to go sort of all over the place, because it was such a small business, and there were not that many employees. But it was amazing to be able to jump into the industry just because of a conversation from a conference.

So I stayed in small press publishing for a while, but also had to be creative in ways to actually make money. So I've had a lot of different jobs over the years. Right after school I moved back home, because the internship wasn't paying me yet. So I became the secretary and a reporter at my hometown newspaper covering school board meetings and borough council meetings, that job taught me a ton.

I worked at Starbucks for a little bit, waking up at 4am to get that health insurance. I did a stint at a writers retreat in Vermont. One year I got to serve as a judge for a book deal competition, next year I was helping the catering staff serve lunch. I've done website and development writing for Widener and Drexel, which I'm currently working on now. I've had the freedom to travel because I am freelancing, I've had some amazing experiences abroad. And a great road trip last fall that have kept me writing creatively, and just meeting new people.

And that's really how FUSE helped me get to where I am. There's definitely a direct line between I started in my literary magazine, we got to FUSE conferences, I got to the AWP Conference, and then I got an internship from that conference. But in a more nebulous sense, I guess my sense of literary community really began at FUSE and everything that I've built and all, like the very cool experiences and jobs that I've had, have built on this community that really started right here, so that's been my experience.