Student Employee Profile: Holly Durr

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As if studying, homework and extracurricular activities aren't enough, some students add a campus job to their balancing act.

Many academic departments, offices and services around campus benefit from the work of student employees and, in return, provide hands-on experience that extends beyond the classroom setting.

In this occasional Lo Que Pasa series, we'll profile student employees to find out how working for the University contributes to their college experience.

This week, meet Holly Durr, an Honors College senior who graduates Friday with degrees from the College of Education, the College of Science and the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Durr is a student employee in two areas of campus: Worlds of Words, the College of Education's global youth literature collection, and at Residence Life.

Name: Holly Durr
Hometown: Tucson
Campus Job: Student Assistant at Worlds of Words; Student Assistant at Residence Life
Major/Year: Senior in speech, language and hearing sciences; linguistics; and special education with a concentration in deaf studies.

What do you do as a student assistant for Worlds of Words?

My main work consists of maintaining and organizing the main space in Worlds of Words. We're an international collection of children's and adolescent literature, so I do things like processing books, organizing the shelves and keeping everything in check there. And I have some really cool additional tasks like graphic design. We do different exhibits in the collection so I'll help orchestrate those. We do things like hanging up paintings and creating student engagement opportunities like a scavenger hunt for classrooms to come and participate in. And I really just help out with events. These programs help with making learning about culture accessible to young children. I will help set things up and read with the kids that show up. It's an amazing job. I love everything that I get to do there.

What is your role specifically at Residence Life?

Mindfulness is this movement that's about paying attention to the present moment. Oftentimes as college students we're really stressed out about everything on our to-do list or the future, or maybe we are worrying about things that have happened in the past and we're kind of being pulled in these different directions. Mindfulness is just a way to focus on what's happening right now in a way that is curious, nonjudgmental so you don't have to criticize what you're going through and with relaxation. It really helps with stress management, which I feel a lot...
of students need. And, it's helped me a lot with my workloads that I've had over the past couple of years. That pretty much sums up mindfulness in a nutshell. And then what I do is help organize events. We do free yoga sessions for students living on campus, and I do mindfulness workshops, so I'll teach some ways that you can practice mindfulness, like meditation, hand massages, body scan, gratitude-type things. I like to help offer tools to students who are looking for ways to de-stress.

**How has your work at WOW and Residence Life impacted others?**

One thing I see having a really concrete impact on others is when we do these things called Culture Kits and Global Story Boxes. These are collections of books, toys and other resources pertaining to a specific culture that teachers can check out and bring into their classrooms so that they can expose kids in kindergarten through elementary school in a really well-rounded way. When we read stories about other cultures, we are learning more than just facts about a different country; we are learning how other people live. So, being able to work on those projects, I feel like it has such a ripple effect? we're sharing it with teachers, who share it with their classrooms, and those children may go on and incorporate that knowledge into their lives. Since I'm a deaf studies major, I helped put together a deaf culture box. We got books on American Sign Language and what it means to be culturally and linguistically deaf and hard of hearing. I like to think that that was something I participated in that has impacted others.

For the mindfulness workshops, for instance an RA (resident assistant) will ask me to come into their hall and put on a program, so I'll provide different demonstrations of mindfulness activities and they will put the event together. We do pre-surveys and post-surveys for these, evaluating current stress levels, what they are hoping to get out of the workshop and what they have learned by the end of it. That has been a really cool way to quantify the impact that these workshops have had. Oftentimes, students will enter into the workshop, on a scale of 1-10, at a stress level of an 8 or 9. And by the end of the program, there are some people who drop all the way to 2s and 3s, and some people that drop to 5s and 6s, still feeling like they might still be stressed but they are better equipped to handle that stress. That has been a really neat way to see the real concrete effect of just a half-hour workshop focused on deep-breathing or meditation.

**What are your plans after graduation and how have your jobs prepared you for this?**

Immediately after graduation, I'll be going to Ecuador with a group of students in the deaf studies program under the direction of (associate professor of practice) Cindy Volk. Right now, we are in the process of learning Ecuadorian Sign Language, and we'll be in the deaf schools there, primarily to learn from them, but we may also share a few of the things we have learned from Ecuadorian Sign Language too. We will do that for one week, and then for the second half of the program we will really get to spend time in Ecuador. We're going to the Galapagos Islands and then we are spending a few days in Peru at Machu Picchu, so I'm ecstatic about that. Then, starting in the fall, I'll be attending the University of Washington, in Seattle, for the Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology program.

Both of my positions have equipped me with a lot of professional development skills, in terms of interacting with different staff and faculty members in the departments. And, I feel like I really appreciate diverse literature when working with kids from WOW. I feel so fortunate to have so much exposure to all of these different books from all different parts of the world and I'm hoping that, even though I'm leaving WOW and going to a place that may not have all
those resources in person, I'll still know how to navigate that system because of the things I've learned at WOW. And then for mindfulness, once again just applying all of my professional development skills there and using those skills during my time as a graduate student. School will still be stressful and so having those mindfulness techniques in my toolkit will be nice.

Can you describe the current WOW exhibit, "Imagination to Celebration: Publication Journeys," and the process you followed in designing it?

We have an exhibit based on the book "Coyote School News," which is by Joan Sandin. She's a local author from Arizona, and the book is about a one-room school in Southern Arizona. We have original artwork from the picture book itself displayed throughout the exhibit. The work I did for the exhibit was really taking what the other student interns wrote up and designing it into different panels that talked about the publication journey for an author from the idea and the inspiration she had to the publication of the book, and to how things developed from there. So, I'll take that writing and then put it in a template-type format, add different pictures that complement it, and organize it in a way that all fits really well and is accessible to the reader.

What is your favorite memory from working at Worlds of Words?

Some of my favorite memories at WOW have occurred in our office staff meetings. Since Rebecca Ballenger became the coordinator of WOW, she has instituted all of these really fun staff meetings for us where we all get know each other and bond with each other. And I think that because we are a staff of multiple people, it really is important to have that cohesion in a group. Oh, and another favorite memory: We participate in the Tucson Festival of Books, which was a really cool opportunity because I got to be an author host. I got to work one-on-one with an author, Myron Uhlberg. He is a child of deaf adults and wrote multiple books about his experiences of growing up with deaf parents. We communicated in sign language, so that was cool to be able to work with him.

How have your jobs impacted your college experience and your future?

For Worlds of Words, being surrounded by books all day, while going into a field that is about speech and language, has shifted my interest when looking at literacy for young children. When I'm working with a kid as a speech language pathologist in the future I want to not just focus on very homogenous characters in books, but include books from a wide array of cultures when working with kids. I ended up doing a study abroad project for my honors thesis and it was on cultural competence for speech language pathology students. And, so, I feel like getting involved in Worlds of Words opened my eyes to cultural competence as a way of treating future clients who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. I don't know if I would have gotten involved in that type of work if it wasn't for Worlds of Words.

And, then for my mindfulness position, that has been such a transformative experience throughout my college career. As I take 21 units a semester, having the tools to help me manage my own stress and then share them with other people has had a really profound impact.

I originally started working on campus because I needed to in order to make financial ends meet. But just from my experiences on campus, I realized that I'm doing it because I love it too. It's offered so many opportunities for me to learn as a person and as a student. So, I would just like to say that it's more than an on-campus job for me. I've really enjoyed the time
I've spent in WOW and at Residence Life.

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