

Undergraduate Student Spotlight: Kalli Leukhardt

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English Department undergraduate Kalli Leukhardt received both a Peak Research Fellowship and an ArtSci Student Summer Mentorship grant to support her ongoing research project aimed at analyzing graphic novels in the classroom, culminating in a study on student engagement with this form of media.

To ensure that she had the correct approval for this process, she began by looking into the Institutional Review Board to see what it would take in order to start a research project involving human subjects. Kalli states, "There is so much behind the scenes work that goes into this type of research to ensure everything is ethical and subjects are protected." She presented her proposal to the university and the school district she would be student teaching at and, once she was approved, she became a certified researcher through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative.

Throughout the summer, Kalli spent her time researching high-quality graphic novels that would be appropriate for the grade level that she would be teaching. She says, "I selected and read 10 graphic novels, from which I built a text set for one of my unit proposals." On top of this, Kalli read numerous materials on the understanding and teaching of graphic novels, using these materials to create two unit plans for her student teaching; one that involved the regular readings set by her mentor teacher, and the other built from the research she had done with graphic novels.

While she teaches this semester, Kalli plans to study student engagement in reading, writing, and talking about graphic literature. The students that agree to be a part of

the study will have three assignments that she will collect and record, and she will record herself teaching.

"Ultimately, my summer research project was preparation for the research study I am enacting in my student teaching that will go into many other avenues to inform other English educators of how we can reframe what type of media we use in the classroom. There are so many great books out there that have benefits for student learning, and so many students who simply don't read or connect with what we are reading," Kalli reflects.

When her student teaching is over, the data will be reviewed and turned into a research paper that she is co-authoring with her USU faculty mentor Assistant Professor Taylor Rose-Dougherty. Kalli will be presenting her research at the National Council of Teachers of English annual conference.

Kalli explains, "My hope is that this research will inspire teachers to reflect on what media they are teaching from and try to find more creative outlets for students to not only become more engaged in what they read in the classroom but build a desire to continue reading outside the classroom. To read not only books, but the world around them."