

Terrance Loewl

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Graham Mote

Filling In the Blanks on the Capstone Process

My capstone was titled Filling In the Blanks: Combating LGBTQ+ Erasure Through Archaeology. While it's a lengthy title, I think it speaks for itself. However, this was not my first idea. My new idea- as thrilling as it was- had many daunting aspects. I wasn't sure I would be able to find speaker or donations. Luckily, I was able to complete these tasks. I also got comfortable for asking for help when I needed it. Overall, my capstone was a success and I am proud of the work that I have put in.

My original capstone idea was to create a handbook that explained the procedure for creating LGBTQ+ clubs in Nashville. I wanted to include necessary paperwork, lists of activities and However, after some advice from Metro's restorative justice department and lying awake for two hours I realized that I wasn't happy with this idea. The internet already had resources. They were are hard to find but they existed. I wanted to include something with history, since it's my main passion. So, I talked to my mentor at my internship. She introduced me to Gabriela Ore, an archaeology graduate student at Vanderbilt who has experience in queer archaeology. Together, we brainstormed an interesting conference idea. The event would host four speakers that would present on different aspects of LGBTQ+ history. Students would transfer between all the breakout sessions. Then students who attended would break into groups to write and perform skits about one of these topics. It was perfect! It combined my interest in historical erasure, LGBTQ+ activism, and theatre. This was a project I could spend months working on.

Finding speakers felt like a daunting task however it was much easier than I thought it would be. I created a list of potential colleges and universities that had Women & Gender Studies and/or anthropology/

sociology departments. For the most part, I emailed department heads asking if they had any staff that might be interested. If a school's website had their professors listed, I contacted them directly. This yielded the most results. Three out of four of my speakers came from this method. My fourth- who ended up having to cancel- was suggested to me from another professor. I was grateful that almost everyone who said they couldn't come gave me the contact information for someone else. I was able to find all of my speakers before school started in August.

My greatest struggle was collecting donations. I spent at least three days at my mom's work, over the summer, contacting businesses. I was very anxious about asking for money. Especially since my original budget called for \$1,000. I dreaded this task so much I actually procrastinated. To get started, I took a page out of the Big Picture handbook and wrote a call and email script. I then set up a GoFundMe so I would have a place to put the money. Then, I contacted the three or four Vanderbilt department heads that were on the top of my list. I was met with only out of office messages. Next, I emailed Nashville Pride to see if they had any donor suggestions. I also contacted Dollar General since they sponsored Pride and my mom had a contact that I could start with. I only heard back from one of these people. I spent more than the initial three days re-contacting these people and searching for potential lunch donations. By the end of the summer, I had roughly \$50 in my GoFundMe account.

Contacting the Pride Festival was one of my best ideas. Not because of the help I received, but because networking is what got me what I needed. First, my mom connected me with a former co-worker who volunteered to design high quality posters for free. Next, I contacted Joseph, the leader of Students of Stonewall, at the Oasis Center to see if he had any community partners who might be able to donate lunch. After I wrote the letter he requested, I received two donations. Through the money supplied by Bass Berry Sims, Joseph bought drinks and snacks for the morning. The other donation from Asurion consisted of 55 box lunches from Panera. One of the judges, Shae Crowell, connected me with Justin Sweatman-Weaver from GLSEN. Mr. Sweatman-Weaver purchased posters for me as well as advertised in the community. Lastly, Dr.

Tung requested funding from the Vanderbilt department heads I had contacted. The supplies they purchased for me filled in many gaps I also found other methods that helped the process. I asked for partial donations instead of the whole budget as well as letting a donor purchase the items themselves.. Thanks to these donors, the needs in my budget shrunk and the rest were covered. I ended up only paying \$20 out of my own pocket.

I also networked all of the volunteers who made my event possible. This idea came easier to me for volunteers than it did for I wanted to have four theatre volunteers at the event. I realized I could contact my friends at the Theatre Bug, my advisor- as well as his wife- and even my grandfather if I needed to. I had at least five people off the bat. The same went for volunteers and judges- Dr. Rager, Lori, Mary, and Dr. Richmond for example. Realizing how many connections I have in both the Nashville and LGBTQ+ communities was something I didn't realize my soul needed.

On the day of my capstone, I received great feedback. One of the speakers, Roberta Nelson, told my mom that they had been to many fancy and expensive events, but they would much rather come to mine. What my mom relayed to me was that they were impressed with my organization and professionalism. I felt wonderful about the event before I heard the feedback. I was blown away by the amazing presentations and subsequent skits. I was so fascinated by everything I learned, I felt like I was on another plane of existence. I can't put words to how amazing it felt to learn about the history of the community and creating a platform where others could learn too. I was impressed by my willingness to diverge from the plan- something I am not usually great at. However, when there were bumps in the road, I handled them well. Left some of the name tags at home? Make new ones. Someone's running late? Change the order of the speakers. I feel like the event went perfectly. It was as if a dream- that I didn't know I even had- came true.

Developing a new project was the best idea I had in this process. This one was followed by many more brilliant ideas that helped me overcome my obstacles. I was able to find speakers, volunteers, money, supplies, and attendees through these trains of thought. I was able to navigate the world of event planning with determination and help from others. It resulting in an amazing conference that I am proud of.