

Service Learning Leader: Stephanie Hayne Beatty
By Christie Comly

In 1989, on the banks of Little River in Windsor, Ontario, a young Stephanie Hayne Beatty experienced one of her first moments of passion and leadership. As part of an environmental project with a local science teacher, students at Concord School were tasked with cleaning up a local river that had become a popular dumpsite. Appalled by the state of the river and in turn society's response to environmental issues, 11-year-old Stephanie Hayne Beatty stood up and told a *MacLean's Magazine* reporter: "These people need an attitude change!" (Nicholas 90). Hayne Beatty recalls this moment as one of the earliest times she remembers being engaged in active service learning. Others may say this moment was a small glimpse of the passionate leader many know today. As you sit across from Hayne Beatty and chat about experiential learning, community service learning or working at Western University, it is difficult to ignore the passion in her voice and the spark in her eye. You immediately find yourself wanting to learn more and wishing that you could work for her, or near her, in hopes to catch some of the positive vibes that radiate from her every being. It is instantly clear that this woman is a leader in her field of experiential learning. Simply put, experiential learning is learning from experience. This is an umbrella concept that includes service learning, which is defined as learning through meaningful community service and reflection (National Service Learning Clearinghouse).

Stephanie Hayne Beatty is the Experiential Learning Team Coordinator at Western University. She first came to Western in 2001 to work for Residence Life and

managed residence buildings for three years. She describes this experience as an “amazing [opportunity] to work with students during this unbelievable, cool time in their lives.” She also notes that it’s a “busy life”, dealing with the parties, the behavior and the mental health issues that are so prevalent in students’ lives. During her early years at Residence Life, Hayne Beatty had the opportunity to participate in several professional development sessions as a Residence Manager (RM). Slowly she began to learn more and more about community service learning. As an RM, she began to understand the importance of community service learning as part of a student’s educational experience. She believes it’s important to develop the “student’s understanding that what they’re learning is not just for [them] in [their] own building of knowledge, but [their] knowledge is for some greater good.” Hayne Beatty has dedicated the past 11 years of her life to making sure students have ample opportunity at Western University to experience community service learning and other experiential education endeavors.

After her life as an RM, Hayne Beatty’s career began to take off. She had created such a positive buzz for what she was doing with her students in residence that her supervisors quickly realized they needed to keep her around. In 2004, after Hayne Beatty developed many ideas around service learning and united it with academics, a new position was created at the university, just for her: Academic and Service Learning Coordinator. Hayne Beatty had accomplished a great thing: “[she] created the awareness around the need for community service learning and built positions for herself within the university.” Hayne Beatty was now in charge of creating experiential learning opportunities for 35 000 students across campus. Later in 2008, after a merger between departments that created the current Student Success Centre, Hayne Beatty had founded

the Experiential Learning Program. A program that started with one person, and just a great idea, currently offers 25 service learning courses on campus and has a staff of 4.5 people. One of these service learning courses includes pairing students taking Spanish courses with new immigrants to London. The students have the chance to share their knowledge of Canada and the English language and in turn learn about a new culture, refine their own development of a foreign language and create meaningful connections with the immigrant family.

When asked how she continued to “create jobs” for herself, Hayne Beatty credits her ability to make “really great connections with people anywhere you go.” She believes it’s the “seemingly silly things that make a difference.” She sends thank you cards, asks questions, and genuinely cares about the people she meets. To Hayne Beatty, “leadership is relationships.” She goes on to say, “It has everything to do with how you interact with people, how you treat people, and how you empower people.” Hayne Beatty credits much of the development of her leadership style to one of her leadership mentors, the director of housing at Western in her early years as an RM. From the beginning of her years at Residence Life, the director put a lot of energy into developing leaders. “The investment in young people as leaders was remarkable,” she says. At the age of 22, it was important that RMs be taken seriously, as they had to run entire buildings of up to 1200 undergrad students. The director of housing would teach her the “unwritten rules” of leadership. She would coach the RMs on what to wear, how to speak to others and she would equip Hayne Beatty with the knowledge needed to feel assured in her position of power. “She [the director] would make sure you felt confident in all of your interactions across campus and were seen as a leader,” she recalls. Hayne Beatty summarizes two important

aspects of leadership she learned from the director of housing: “her investment in people and her transparent and clear communication.” Hayne Beatty now takes the leadership lessons learned from her mentor, adds her obvious passion for the overall development of students, and has created her own leadership style that she implements with the staff and students she works with on a daily basis. Her ability to make you instantly feel comfortable, combined with her passion for engaging students in their community, has helped her build successful experiential learning programs across the university.

Believe it or not, Hayne Beatty claims that as a young child she was a very shy person. However, thanks to many opportunities in high school and during her time at Carleton University in Ottawa, Hayne Beatty slowly came out of her shell. She describes the “post-university Stephanie,” as “more adventurous, [and] more spirited.” The opportunities and her experience with service learning ignited a fire in her to do more. Hayne Beatty speaks of the significance of making an impact on the current undergrad students at Western University: “We’ve got four years to connect the head, hands and heart of these students and one of the ways to do this is through experiential learning.” She clearly sees the importance of developing the *whole* person and is focused on the big picture: “Can we enhance their learning, deepen it and make it matter for someone else in the community?” That’s her hope and her passion.

Part of Hayne Beatty’s job is to be innovative and create more opportunities to have more students buy into experiential learning. In 2002, Hayne Beatty organized the first Alternative Spring Break Program. She took 5 students in a van to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania for a week long bout of community service. In the past ten

years this program has expanded exponentially. In 2012, the Alternative Spring Break Program took 140 students to 7 different places across Canada and the world (History of the Program). The Alternative Spring Break Program has changed the lives of many students in the past ten years. As you look around Hayne Beatty's office, you see the walls are splashed with pictures of successful past trips. She beams with pride as she shares stories about the different groups she has traveled with to places such as New Orleans or the Dominican Republic. As a leader in this program, Hayne Beatty is creating more leaders. The students come back from trips changed, with a better understanding of their own selves and a greater awareness of their surroundings. "They change programs, take new courses and want to do more with their life," Hayne Beatty says with enthusiasm. The Alternative Spring Break Program is continuing to give students the confidence to become the leaders of tomorrow. Hayne Beatty speaks of her goals and vision as she says, "The more confident, passionate, and compassionate we can make a student after those four years... that's what I am passionate about it." In terms of role models and leaders, Hayne Beatty is one you want to have around. She has become a leader because of her passion and her passion has created more leaders.

In recent years, Hayne Beatty has moved on from the Alternative Spring Break Program to focus more on experiential learning in the different faculties across campus. Many people thought she would struggle with the idea of letting go of her "baby," a program she founded. But she believes that "letting go" is another important part of her leadership philosophy. "You have to be able to pass the torch and move on," she says. To her, part of leadership is about "following up on great

ideas, communicating them out to people and engaging other people in these ideas.”

This philosophy has allowed her to have success with the programs she has developed. Currently Hayne Beatty is working towards the Western University vision of “Internationalization.” Hayne Beatty and her staff are helping to send Western students overseas for international entrepreneurial internships.

Hayne Beatty has a leadership style that makes her approachable and challenges others to do more. She believes that communication is a vital part of leadership. “You need to make sure people know all those great things out there,” she tells me. She later adds it is imperative you create a “positive buzz for yourself and [strive] to make great, or even crazy, ideas happen.” Hayne Beatty is full of charisma and energy. After spending a few hours with her, you become inspired to do new things and to do more for your community. What better lesson to teach our younger generations? Experiential learning is slowly taking over institutions of higher education and Stephanie Hayne Beatty is on the front line leading the troops.

Works Cited

“History of the Program.” *Alternative Spring Break*. Western University, 2012. Web. 30 October 2012.

Mayne, Paula. “2009 Recipient – Stephanie Hayne.” *The Western Award of Excellence*. Western University, 2009. Web. 25 October 2012.

Nicholas, M. “The Green Generation.” *Maclean’s Magazine* 103.38 (1990): 90. *Canadian Reference Centre*. Web. 30 October 2012.

“What is Service Learning.” *National Service-Learning Clearinghouse*. ETR Associates, 2012. Web. 31 October 2012.