



Dr. Stephen R. Briggs

# PATHS THROUGH BERRY

The paths Berry students follow to LifeReady are necessarily personal, yet they unfold within the context of relationships that shape them.

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**W**hen Kelsey Zablan (14C) received her diploma in May, she was already working one day a week for Turner Broadcasting System in preparation for her current full-time position as product coordinator at HLN (formerly Headline News). Kelsey uses innovative software to analyze Web-page metrics and emerging trends regarding HLN's "must-see, must-share" stories of the day.

There are also unexpected assignments. Recently, she was asked to coordinate a monthly event that promotes HLN products with key audiences. Kelsey planned the program format from the ground up, including a watch-and-discuss session focused on the hottest videos and a social hour on the latest trending apps. Approval of the format required Kelsey to present the idea directly to HLN's president via videoconference. It was her first major presentation, so she was relieved and pleased when he approved the project.

Kelsey has a strikingly 21st-century job, and she is poised for success. But how did Kelsey – once hesitant even to make a professional phone call – mature to the point

of being ready for a major presentation just weeks into her first post-graduation job? Kelsey's path highlights two vital components for making the most of opportunity: purposeful preparation and purposeful relationships. And her story demonstrates that an education of the head, heart and hands – Berry's time-tested approach – is as effective as ever in preparing graduates to be LifeReady.

## MAKING THE MOST OF COLLEGE: PURPOSEFUL PREPARATION

Kelsey's success in large part derives from the way she persistently pursued opportunities to mix academic studies and firsthand experience. With interests in computer science and the arts, her passion materialized at the intersection of Web development, visual communication and graphic design. She probed this passion by creating an interdisciplinary major of her own design, calling it "computing and digital media."

To build upon her classes in these areas, Kelsey found work on campus as a Web

content assistant in the e-communications office and a teaching assistant in computer programming. She then served for two years as creative director for Nonprofit Strategic Services, a Berry Student Enterprise that assists local nonprofit organizations with marketing, fundraising, public relations and strategic planning.

Kelsey's efforts focused on developing sustainable websites, leading the design team in workflow and scheduling. During these two years, she also worked off-campus as social media and marketing coordinator for The Season in Rome, using social media and blog platforms to promote the company's wedding and event-planning service.

By the summer of her junior year, Kelsey had put together an enviable resumé and



STUDENT PHOTOGRAPHER HAYDEN SLOAN (14C)

skill set. Her work experience had resulted in a portfolio of tech-savvy projects displaying her artistic facility with a variety of digital design tools. As importantly, these completed projects demonstrated her initiative, attentiveness to the needs of the client, and “can-do” mindset. That summer, Kelsey was lined up for a job in the creative services department at Berry when, at the eleventh hour, an opportunity became available as a Web and design intern in the corporate communication department at Turner Broadcasting. Kelsey’s initiative and preparation had opened an important door.

#### **MAKING THE MOST OF AN INTERNSHIP: PURPOSEFUL RELATIONSHIPS**

When they sat down to review expectations, Kelsey’s internship supervisor asked if she knew anyone at Turner who could help her meet people at the company. Within the week, Kelsey was sitting down to lunch with Berry graduate Gavin McGinnis (09C), who was eager to help because he too had been an intern at Turner. He offered two pieces of advice directed toward making the most of the internship.

First, Gavin encouraged her to be a shining example of the Berry work ethic, which in Kelsey’s case was like pouring water into a glass that was already overflowing. Second, echoing her manager, he emphasized the value of creating connections – genuine relationships – at the company. Kelsey was uncomfortable in this regard, not wanting as an intern to overstep boundaries with professionals. Gavin assured her, however, that “networking” was a foundational tool and an often-needed skill for doing a job well.

Gavin mentored her in how to build connections thoughtfully by asking meaningful questions and exploring common interests. He shared the detailed Excel spreadsheet he maintained as a reference guide for his own network of professional colleagues. More than that, Gavin promptly introduced Kelsey to 10 people at Turner. As she met with these professionals, they in turn suggested others she should meet. By the time her internship ended, she had benefitted from many discussions and coffees and had a

network of people she could turn to for constructive feedback.

Although Gavin moved to Chicago last year to take a new position as a marketing manager responsible for product promotion at Turner Broadcasting, he stays in touch with Kelsey via Facebook and Instagram and remains a source of encouragement. His caring interest is rooted in his own path through Berry. He too made the most of his college years. As a varsity baseball player, Gavin pursued his interest in sports by majoring in marketing and management, working in athletic administration, and leading campus service efforts. Because of his work ethic and integrity, a Berry graduate and a Berry parent helped him obtain a sports internship involving new media at Turner. Now, Gavin is eager to “pay forward” some of what he received by helping another Berry student; his forthright request of Kelsey is that she do the same for Berry students in the years to come.

Another source of encouragement to Kelsey was Fred Tharpe (68A), senior director of global construction management at Turner and a member of the Berry College Board of Trustees. Fred and Kelsey had lunch together when she was an intern, and Fred was able to introduce her to several people at the company with complementary interests. In a similar manner, Fred has been helpful to other recent Berry graduates, including Candler Hobbs (12C) and Hayden Sloan (14C), as they have explored internship and employment opportunities. In Kelsey’s case, Fred has been a wise adviser, offering perspective and a voice of experience as she works through opportunities and challenges.

One of the last people that Kelsey met informally during her summer internship was subsequently selected to start a new department at Turner, charged with finding ways to reposition the HLN brand using its digital resources to establish partnerships. It was a new idea and a new work team. As the team was forming, Kelsey’s name was mentioned, and the manager remembered her. Kelsey joined the team in its earliest days, which meant working Mondays for the month prior to graduation. Interestingly, Berry alumnus Sam Schenkman-Moore (99C) also is a member of this small team.

#### **LIFEREADY**

Certainly, Kelsey is fast out of the blocks professionally. But she also leaves Berry with a strong sense of personal responsibility and a heart for helping others. She assisted several community nonprofits with her expertise in creative design, including leadership roles at Berry with Colleges Against Cancer and Relay for Life. And, as she departed these “beloved positions,” it mattered to her to find successors who cared deeply enough to make a difference. Kelsey understands that people “can easily tell who’s there because of passion, who’s there for the title, and which one they would rather follow.”

Kelsey’s story is both inspiring and instructive. Two things stand out. First is her intentionality in pursuing an education of the head, heart and hands – intentionality combined with initiative, energy and a teachable attitude. Second is the value of relationships built along the way, particularly relationships with Berry alumni.

Students forge their own paths through Berry, but, like Kelsey, they do not walk these separate paths alone. They intersect with others all along the way. There is delight both in the relationships that emerge and in the opportunities they present to help others become LifeReady. **B**

#### **DO YOU HAVE A LIFEREADY STORY TO TELL?**

We love to hear how alumni have made the most of their Berry opportunity through purposeful preparation and purposeful relationships. Tell us about your path to LifeReady and the surprising ways that doors opened for you.

Please send us an email at [LifeReadyStories@berry.edu](mailto:LifeReadyStories@berry.edu).