

## **A Look at the Impact of Academic Extracurriculars on Professional Development: A Personal Reflection**

Ayzel Calder

Due to a myriad of reasons, including Covid and being Canadian, my master's was entirely virtual. Having completed online courses in my undergrad, I wasn't entirely new to the process and knew I would be able to adapt to the digital learning environment easily. However, virtual study can be incredibly isolating, especially when centred within a vastly different time zone. As a naturally introverted person, I knew this would be where I would both excel—where I wouldn't need to interact face to face on a frequent basis, thus not becoming emotionally and mentally exhausted as quickly—and fail, through limiting human interaction, avoiding relationships, and missing opportunities. Going into Robert Gordon University's Information and Library Studies programme, my goal was to avoid those potential failures, make the most of my experience, and ultimately push myself out of my comfort zone. By volunteering as a Course Representative, I did just that.

My work as a Course Rep ensured I did not fall into the eventual seclusion of virtual education. In fact, by participating in Course Representative training, planning initiatives with my fellow Representatives and our programme head, and developing activities and virtual meetups for our cohort, I did quite the opposite. I was able to push myself into an environment that encouraged me to grow and learn more about myself as an individual, peer, collaborator, and leader.

### **Communication**

The work I did as a Representative set me up for success in environments outside of school. First and foremost, the work as a Rep strengthened my casual and professional social skills, both verbally and in writing. Through the diversity of those I interacted with as a Rep, I learned the importance of approaching situations and environments through different lenses. This skill has been beneficial in how I approach others in my professional life. My Emotional Intelligence (Goleman 1995) diversified in the face of new cultures and communication expectations (such as attending a Scottish university as a Canadian) and has helped me adapt my approaches to be more inclusive and understanding of how various external factors play a part in such a deceptively complex element of human interaction.

### **Relationship Building**

The core of being a Course Representative was to be the bridge between students and the university, the connecting piece between the two. As such, building relationships was a necessary part of the role.

As a Rep, I developed relationships with my fellow Representatives with whom I shared the responsibility within my programme, the other RGU Representatives from other programmes, my classmates and peers, the university, and my instructors. Relationships I would have never been able or willing to make had I not put myself in the role of a Rep.

The position gave me extraordinary possibility to build strong relationships and even stronger friendships; it opened my eyes to the ease of making those connections and gave me the experience and confidence to translate it to my professional life.

### **Organisation and Planning Skills**

Finally, my experience as a Course Rep has significantly impacted my organisational and planning skills. Managing my own personal schedules (work, school, personal life) was a test in and of itself. By adding in my Course Rep work and other extracurricular activities, I had to work to ensure every minute of my time was well-used and organised. I found help in the Eisenhower Matrix and my ability to prioritise became even more refined. These skills have easily transferred into the workplace and have helped me succeed in my new career within a few short weeks. I am confidently able to accept new assignments without concern about my ability to complete them or meet deadlines, I can easily manage multifaceted programs, and am confident in my ability to work on more than one project at a time.

Of all the extracurriculars I participated in during my master's, I found my experiences as a Course Representative the most helpful, beneficial, and transferrable to a workplace context.

### **References**

GOLEMAN, D., 1995. *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. 25th Anniversary Edition. New York: Bantam Books.