

Kaitlynn Weaver found her niche in Child & Youth Studies

When Kaitlynn Weaver (BA '16) walks across the stage to receive her Master of Arts, she'll do so knowing she took every opportunity available to learn and develop as a person and as a scholar.

"What has made my master's experience so great are the people I've met here and elsewhere and the opportunities I've been given," she says. "My supervisor, Dr. Kristine Alexander, and my committee (Drs. Caroline Hodes, Jan Newberry and Amy von Heyking) actively sought opportunities for me in places I wouldn't even have thought to look. The level of investment they had in me, my experiences, my ability to network, to gain confidence in myself, my research and my public speaking skills has been so valuable. The last three years have been so formative for me in ways that I can't even explain."

Originally from Rocky Mountain House, Weaver followed in her older sister, Sarah's, footsteps in continuing her education at the University of Lethbridge. Right from the start, Weaver felt at home at the U of L.

"I was able to shadow Sarah as a university student over my spring break in high school," says Weaver. "I sat in on a philosophy and a sociology class. I was excited and engaged and the philosophy professor asked me questions in class and had me participate like I was a university student. That was really impactful and being here has been awesome."

When she first arrived in 2012, Weaver studied New Media. As part of the U of L's liberal education requirements, she also took a class in sociology.

"I really liked it and I liked the way they were talking about people's identities and power structures, and I wanted to pursue it further," she says. "I decided to switch my major to sociology and do a minor in Women & Gender Studies, which was a huge part of my university experience."

As she was nearing the completion of her bachelor's, Dr. Carol Williams (Women & Gender Studies) asked her if she was considering graduate school and told her that Alexander, who's also a Canada Research Chair (Tier 2) in Child and Youth Studies and director of the U of L's Institute for Child and Youth Studies (I-CYS), was looking for graduate students.

Weaver knew she wanted to focus on youth during graduate school, as she had been a volunteer at the Boys & Girls Club of Lethbridge and District and had completed an independent study about youth unemployment with Dr. Muriel Mellow. She obtained a Canada Graduate Scholarship through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), which later led to receiving a Michael Smith Foreign Studies Supplement Award.

“When I started my master’s, I was a graduate assistant for a project called Elders of the Future, which was a 10-year project on Blackfoot child-rearing practices in southern Alberta,” says Weaver. “I was asked to run children and youth programming to create photos and artworks for an eventual exhibit at Casa.”

The project, a collaboration between the Opokaa’sin Early Intervention Society and I-CYS, celebrated the resiliency of local Blackfoot communities through their family and child-rearing practices. Weaver worked with children and youth at Opokaa’sin and helped organize events around the exhibit.

“I got to work with Blackfoot youth and children at Opokaa’sin and that’s not something I would have otherwise been able to do,” she says.

The foreign studies award allowed Weaver to spend three months studying at Rutgers University Camden in New Jersey, the first American institution to have a childhood studies department. Supervised by Dr. Lauren Silver, Weaver lived in Philadelphia, just across the Delaware River from the university, from January to April, 2018. She attended Silver’s classes and met other faculty members in the department.

“I grew more as a person and as a professional in those three months than I ever have in my life,” she says. “I was completely taken out of my comfort zone and immersed in a different lifestyle. I presented in a class, got to talk to every professor in the department and gained lifelong friendships.”

For her thesis, Weaver spoke to Faculty of Education alums, asking them to focus on their childhood experiences and their experiences being adults. Her thesis, titled *“Growing the Finest Teachers Possible”: Theorizing how Young Teachers Challenge, (Re)produce, and are Subject to Discourses of Childhood, Adolescence, and Adulthood*, examined the expectations of new teachers and the reality they found in the classroom.

“These teachers focused a lot on their own experience as educators and expected a lot more freedom and autonomy in their classrooms to “shape” the children they’re working with,” Weaver says. “They found out that actually, just because they’re adults and just because they’re educators, doesn’t give them complete freedom. The expectations of adulthood and the realities didn’t really match up.”

Now setting off on her life as a professional, Weaver continues to be involved with youth. She recently began employment with Family and Community Support Services (Barons-Eureka-Warner) and the Boys & Girls Club of Lethbridge and District.

“It’s a partnership position funded by the Government of Canada. It’s a full-time position and I work in southern Alberta rural communities and get youth from Grades 9 to 12 involved in volunteering and civic engagement in some way.”