From the moment I began conversing with Dr. Richard O'Connor about the research I would be partaking in, I knew that I would be pushed intellectually in a way that I never had before. As an undergraduate student, I am often pushed collectively; doing research, I am alone. While that may seem obvious or naïve, it was an important realization to have. While the pressure is solely on you to perform, the ball is in your court “to grab life by the lapels and kick ass,” as Maya Angelou once said. To some, the work that I did might seem like typical course work for an anthropology student. However, the lens that this work allowed me to see through evolved my perception of anthropology and allowed me to see the ways anthropology is transforming as a field of study.

For the past eight weeks, I've worked under the supervision of Dr. Richard O'Connor, an anthropology professor who is one of the co-heads of the College's Rethink Task Force on Advising, to develop a qualitative understanding of Sewanee's campus life and student perspective. The research was particularly interested in how students find their place, move through the curriculum, and develop intellectually. The first three weeks consisted of me reading the following articles and books on higher education: (1) Moffatt's *Coming of Age in New Jersey* (1989); (2) Chambliss & Takacs *How College Works* (2014); (3) Dorothy Lee's “Autonomous Motivation” (1961); (4) Herve Varenne's *La Vie en Appleton* (1978); (5) Richard O'Connor's “Studying a Sewanee Education” (2004); (6) Shawn Means’ “Search for Self in a Divided World: The Role of Academic Majors in Self-Integration at
Sewanee” (2004); (7) Patrick Hayden’s “Selfhood at Sewanee” (2002); (8) D. Holland et al’s “How Figured Worlds of Romance Become Desire”; (9) Rebekah Nathan’s My Freshman Year (2005); (10) Mary Grigsby’s College Life through the Eyes of Students (2009); (11) P. F. Kluge’s Alma Mater (1993).

Along with reading these selections of higher education literature, I took detailed notes comparing these authors’ findings with the experiences of the Sewanee community. Dissecting similarities and differences between the text and Sewanee, the literature taught me what to focus on in my interviews and offered additional clues on when to further questioning. I met with Dr. O'Connor frequently during this period, and we spent hours searching the text and offering insights of our own. I enjoyed these moments exponentially for O'Connor affirmed my conclusions and perused my brain for deeper insights; he made me vital to the operation. For the pieces of literature that O'Connor was not as familiar with, my notes furthered in detail as I collected key quotes from the text to further assist his endeavors.

After building a strong framework, I read examples of past interviews as O'Connor reviewed the interview protocol with me, a protocol that was used on his previous study from 2004 for the Center for Teaching. Then, the interviews began. I enjoyed the interview process tremendously. Each interview was unique and amazing in its own special way; yes, some interviewees were more difficult to un-puzzle than others, but each interview offered great insight into our study. These interviews touched me in a great way. To use a corny simile, every interview was like finding a needle in a haystack; every human contributes to the world in his or her own irreplaceable way, and this study exhibits just that even on a small scale.
After conducting each interview, I then transcribed them, which took about six to eight times as long as the interview itself. Having trekked through this process, I then reread the interview, noting key parts and typed up comments and conclusions at the end, often comparing the interview to others. Dr. O'Connor and I followed up discussing and dissecting each interview often noting moments when I should have continued pursuing a dialogue and affirming moments when I followed up accurately. As a product of one of these discussions, I began a case study. E-mailing current students and recent alumni, I asked, “What makes you feel important at Sewanee?” The collection of answers demonstrates the uniqueness of each student’s experiences and provides an array of perspectives on what fulfillment and success looks like in the Sewanee community.

When the eight weeks concluded, I still wanted to continue the interview process. I truly enjoy getting to know individuals, but, even better, I enjoy knowing that the information that I’ve collected is going to better the experiences of others. Walking away from this internship and entering my senior year, I find myself more confused about what “path” I want to take. Often times, internships end and one feels better knowing that “that” was something they do not want to do. However, I’m more confused because of the positive experience that I did have. Collecting ethnographic research is an amazing process that left me feeling tremendously fulfilled, in this particular instance. But I also tremendously enjoyed getting to understand how universities, as an institution, work. I even had the privilege to view the Dean of Students NSSE, CIRP, and FSSE data from 2013 to compare the statistics with the dialogues I was collecting. Viewing the institution from different roles was fascinating because it mirrors what anthropologists do: constantly view the world from different lenses. While this experience might not immediately transfer to graduate
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school, the experience affirmed that I truly do enjoy educational environments, and I hope to pursue a career within that type of space.

I leave this internship hoping that my contributions will lead to executed improvements that will advance the ReThink Task Force’s goal to “meet the needs of all students, and specifically, at-risk students,” and improve the experiences of those within the Sewanee community. I’m confident that even though I don’t know what “path” I’m heading towards, the path that I’m on has been a positive one because the experiences, trials, and lessons that Sewanee has taught me, in and out of the classroom.