

- Westminster Alum Turned Fulbright Winner Pursues an Opportunity Abroad

Vanessa Eveleth ('23) – What do you do when the path you thought you were on suddenly disappears? Well, you find a new journey, which is exactly what [environmental studies](#) and [Honors College](#) alum Sally Miller ('19) did when she found out that the jobs she had lined up were no longer possible after the COVID-19 pandemic hit. “My first thought was, ‘Okay, I need to reroute and come up with a new plan,’” Sally says. During her time at Westminster, Sally was involved with global learning and had always imagined herself living abroad and immersing herself in a new culture. Though the world was largely shut down, Sally pursued a pathway to accomplish her goals once it reopened.

In the summer of 2019 (after Sally’s graduation), she and her roommates took a trip to Western Europe and trekked the Camino de Santiago. It was during this trip that Sally says she fell in love with Spain. “After that summer spent in Europe, I knew that I wanted to try to live abroad at some point,” Sally says. Initially, Sally considered applying for graduate schools abroad but decided that it wasn’t the right path for her. “I looked into that application process and just got overwhelmed,” Sally explains. “And I was like, ‘I don’t really know what I want to do for grad school. I would just want a student visa, so maybe it’s not the right reason.’” Instead, Sally lined up some other jobs within the country’s borders. And then, her plans got upended with arrival of the pandemic.

Sally remembers telling a close friend, “I just don’t know what I should do with my life right now; everything I’m doing got canceled.” Her friend was a two-year participant of the [Fulbright U.S. Student Program](#), which provides grants to individuals for study/research or English Teacher Assistant positions across the world. Sally’s friend suggested that she apply for a Fulbright grant as a way to travel and study internationally. In October of 2020, during the time when Sally was supposed to be a program assistant for the Expedition Semester at Westminster, she submitted her Statement of Grant Purpose for the opportunity to teach English in Spain.

Fast-forward to June of 2021, and Sally is a Fulbright winner in the highest competitive year in the history of the Fulbright program, according to the Institute of International Education who administers the award. She will begin her work in Spain in the Fall of 2021.

Dr. Alicia Cunningham-Bryant, a Westminster Honors professor and the director of Fellowship Advising, assisted Sally during her Fulbright grant application. A significant portion of the grant is writing, a skill that Sally says she doesn’t feel she’s particularly strong at. “Alicia was my rock,” Sally says. “I would not have been able to do any of this without her. She was so supportive and responsive. Anytime I’d send her a draft, she would read it and get back to me even if it was a weekend. It was like she could tell through some of my emails that I was freaking out and would be like ‘it’s going to be okay. We’re going to get through this.’”

Westminster’s encouragement and emphasis on communication between students and faculty significantly influenced Sally. “It was really easy to ask for help and support because I spent my whole college career asking professors to read over papers before I turned them in, which was really helpful,” Sally says.

Through Westminster’s environmental studies program, Sally discovered a passion for food sustainability—an issue that is her supplementary project’s focus outside of her 16 to 20 hours teaching English in Spain. In her grant proposal, Sally argued that the US is terrible at distributing food. “If you send me to Spain,” Sally says, referring back to her essay, “I will work in food banks and learn how another country distributes and processes food and see if it’s similar, different, better, or worse than how we do it.” After observing and researching Spain’s food distribution, Sally plans on returning to the US with that information and attempting to change the US’s agricultural systems.

In Spain, Sally will be working alongside another teacher, helping Spanish students learn English. Sally chose the English Teacher Assistant role because she loves teaching and watching kids learn and grow. “I spend a lot of time working with kids in outdoor education,” Sally says, “but I’m excited to take that to the classroom and see how a classroom in another country is different or similar to ours.”

The importance of English as a second language also impacted her decision. “English is such a connecting language,” she says. “It could be the difference between succeeding and not succeeding in some countries. To be able to teach other people English and provide them that tool and power is a really cool thing to have experience in.”



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