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# Personal Reflections from ePortfolio: AHRC New York City

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**Elisa Malojer**

## **My Biography - What am I bringing to AHRC NYC**

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My name is Elisa Malojer and I am a 21-year old Austrian student majoring in Global Marketing Management at Pace University in New York.

During my time in high school, I was highly involved in voluntary work. I was working for two different projects at the time: The first one involved visiting people (of all ages) in hospitals and hospices to make their time as pleasant and joyful as possible. According to their both physical and mental state, I read to them, we played cards and even went for small walks.

In addition to that, I am a passionate horseback-rider, so I was engaged in therapeutic horseback riding with mainly children. We spent a lot of time teaching them the proper handling and care of horses, as well as the basic training in horseback riding. To be honest, it was one of the most beautiful experiences in my life to see how those children embraced the contact and love of both animals and their guardians.

This is why I am really looking forward to this new challenge and experience, as for me one of the best ways to grow as a person is to help another person grow and develop.

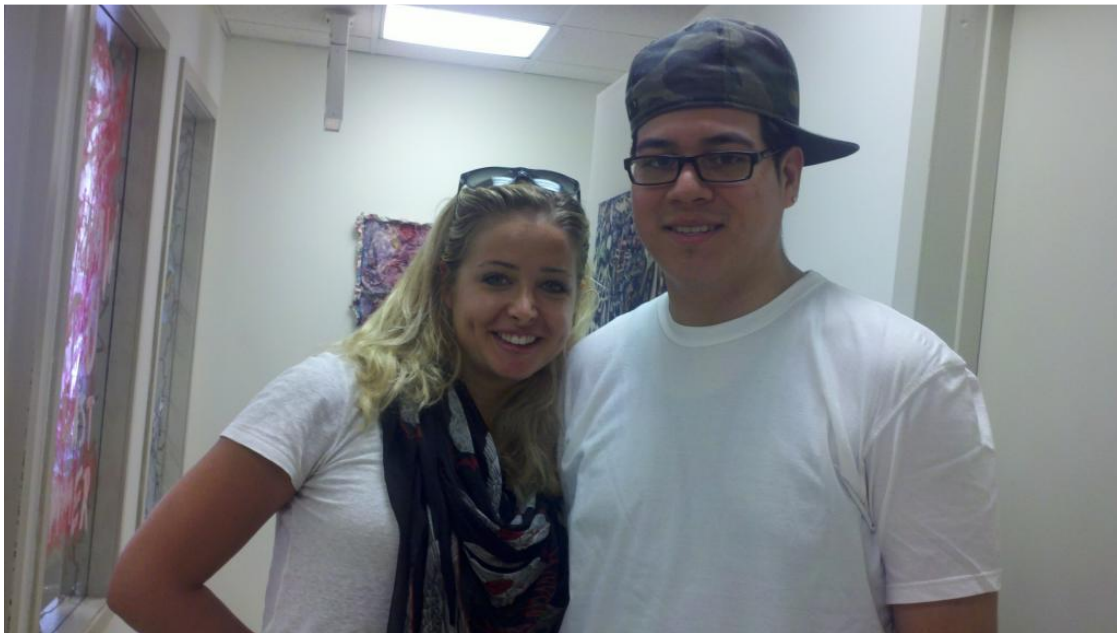


## **My Friends in the Course at Pace**

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Honestly, I am incredibly happy with the group of students at the AHRC Brooklyn because I personally feel like we are an amazing team. I really enjoy seeing everyone outside our class sessions and knowing that we will most likely - and hopefully - all stay in touch after this semester.

Unfortunately, I did not get the chance to take pictures with everyone today, as Bree for example went to the AHRC on Tuesday because her partner Denisha could not be there today. But for now I have this picture with Martin :)



## **My Project at AHRC NYC**

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It took me quite a while to get to know Sean and to make him trust me, as well as open up to me. This is why we do not have as much progress yet as a lot of my colleagues regarding our project. However, Sean made it very clear that he likes to talk and do presentation (he held a speech at his graduation ceremony) and is not interested in doing a movie or anything too fancy. So we agreed on doing a power point presentation, or actually mainly he is doing it because he is an incredible writer (especially compared to my "foreigner English"). We are still working on an outline and the topics we will cover because Sean is amazingly talented in so many things, not just being a wandering encyclopedia about horse racing. I am sure though, we will have the first draft finished by next week.



## **My Mid-Term Reflection Journal**

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"Let me listen to me and not to them" (Disability Land, A. Brightman 2006, p. 53). Listening to yourself is usually the best approach to succeed in life. And success in the sense of getting what you want with a certain effort - however it should never be at cost of other individuals. Listening to yourself also implies following your inner instincts rather than social norms or stereotypes. This is the reason why I personally think that this course offers the unique

possibility to learn how to listen to your “inner voice”, follow your instincts and cast off the societal pressure. When telling people my age at different colleges that I am doing community work as part of the program in my school, they cannot believe or understand the meaning or background to this class or why it is required. They might even make fun of the people we are working with and try to turn them and our work and commitment into ridicule. However, in my opinion this is only their way of hiding and covering their insecurities about “different” things in life; and lot of times we subconsciously define something different as something scary. By people’s nature, we tend to stay away from things we perceive as scary or frightening – which hence prevents them of getting to know more about what they actually are afraid of. This is why a lot of people want to get involved in community work - in theory - but when they are facing this challenge and opportunity, they will try to find a way out. The fact that this class is a core requirement for our graduation, definitely helps to “push” a lot of boundaries and thresholds of students, as most of us did not know what to expect at the beginning of class and seemed almost frightened about what it is going to be like.

I can only speak about my own experience and maybe refer to my friends at the AHRC Brooklyn but it has been one of the most challenging, interesting and rewarding classes. It shows how important it is to listen to your intuition and face your “fear” – at least if it is based on a judgment you did not even make first hand, though has been solely formed through social implications and norms. This is one of the reasons why I thought the book “DisabilityLand” by Alan Brightman has not only been a very interesting but as well very inspiring, motivating and helpful reading resource for this course. The quote “Let me listen to me and not to them” (Disability Land, A. Brightman 2006, p. 53) was so poignant and inspirational for me, as it can be interpreted in so many different ways. Mine was just one of them.

“DisabilityLand” represents the dreams, challenges and just everyday life of people with dis-abilities, their families and friends – however it is not only about the individual itself but most stories represent the families and their experiences with the individual in a social context and the thereby emerging struggles for recognition. These stories are paired with common, very short phrases that have the power to trigger the so-called “Need for Cognition”, which is used in psychology and indicates the enjoyment of thinking. It is amazing how 5 or 6 words – common words – can be so powerful and loaded with energy, as for example in “common sense is not so common” (Disability Land, A. Brightman 2006, p. 22). In addition to getting the reader thinking about the feelings and stories of the individuals, the book also manages to talk about stereotypes in a very subtle, non-offensive way. One story mentions how a young, talented, blind artist held a speech in a school to encourage young individuals, he finished with “...And if you want to be an astronaut, then get going and become an astronaut. And don’t let anyone or anything get in your way.” (Disability Land, A. Brightman 2006, p. 16). However, it turns out that a lot of young, blind individuals in the audience felt betrayed, as he reminded them of what they could never be (astronauts). Applying this to the real world, to our world, it shows us that we always have to be sincere. We have to treat them with respect and honesty, and NOT convey dreams that will never come true. They might be individuals with dis-abilities but a grand

percentage of them are a lot smarter than most of us and exactly know about their abilities. So there is no reason to get caught up in any “stereotype-treatment”, as the usual pitying them, but rather expressing our real feelings and help them focus on their abilities.

This is what I am trying to do with my partner Sean at the AHRC Brooklyn facility, when working on our project. We are talking about his interests and passions, which mainly enclose anything with horses, Clifford the big read dog and Halloween, and we work on his skills to develop and present a power point presentation. At the beginning of our project, I was trying to convince Sean that a movie about him and his life would be an incredibly fun idea and project, however I discovered his sense of ideas and a very strong determination very soon. Sean is a very smart and educated young man, who recently graduated from high school and just joined the AHRC this summer. He loves to talk and present, even though he might get a little shy around new people when not knowing them very well. I had to face this first obstacle of making him trust me when starting this course, within a couple of hours though Sean started lightening up and trusting me. From the very first moment me mentioning the idea of a movie; Sean insisted on much rather doing a presentation where he can feel the excitement and amazement of the people listing to him “first hand” – not through him being or acting in a movie. This is why we decided to keep it very simple with a PowerPoint Presentation about him and his favorite things in life – and every time we go through another slide, he just enlightens with joy and pride.

Summarizing, I am very excited and happy with what I have done so far and hope Sean is thinking the same about our project. More than just one AHRC staff member has told us that we make an amazing team. And I absolutely and proudly agree with them. For this matter, I would also like to thank our Professor, Lauren and everyone who helped pairing me up with the most amazing partner. Thank you for making my experience so pleasant.

## **My Final Reflection Journal**

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I was really looking forward to going to class today, as I was curious to see how everyone was doing and what they did with their partners at their facilities. It has been a couple of months since we all met for the first time and shared our previous experiences in this field and expectations about what did course might do for us. This is why I was really excited to actually hear about what my colleagues think about this course and outcome now. After working with their partners and helping them develop their presentations and possibly even certain skills. It was also interesting to see how well all of us know our individuals by now and that we can even give suggestions to the AHRC stuff about what our partners would like to do, as Tali for example mentioned that her partner Scott would love to go to a concert of Paul McCartney; or any concert where they play music of the Beatles. I also found it actually very funny that two people had not only the same birthday – but as the same birth year, which immediately made me smile and made me feel so connected to them. Furthermore, our birthday is on December 27<sup>th</sup>, so it is coming up

very soon and that even enhanced the feeling I had about the individuals. Really impressive was the little movie made about her partner Gabe and how she managed to express and present his personality in so little time. What I was most surprised and stunned about were the animation movies and pictures some of my colleagues developed with their individuals; there is so much potential and passion in these drawings and animations that they immediately draw you in their story and want to know more about it. This is why I think there is a lot of work ahead of those individuals and also the AHRC to support them in fulfilling their dreams.

Reflecting my experience at the AHRC, I cannot say anything else apart from it being a pleasure and honor to get to know all those amazing people and actually work with them. I personally think that I was not the only one helping Sean develop new ideas, structures and methods how to approach things; but much more Sean helping me in looking "outside the box". It was a real challenge at the beginning to gain his trust but once he opened up to me, I really felt like he accepted me with all my flaws and tried to help me to get more self-confident about the skills I have. Especially as described in my last blog, it was amazing to see how much Sean appreciated me by the time I had to leave and actually his mom explaining the reasoning behind his lack of trust – or difficulty to trust – with a very simple, however considerate and in-depth thought: "So many people have come into Sean's life, he trusted and loved everyone immediately but he was disappointed so many times. So he built up his own barriers. He is very sensitive to meeting new people. So he really needs to take his time. But you managed to break his barrier. He really likes you and appreciates you as a person. Please keep on teaching him things. And please allow him to expand your horizon. I promise it will help both of you." These are the words his mother and grandmother told me when I was leaving after my presentation at the AHRC Brooklyn Facility. So, overall even though I was very concerned and insecure about what this semester and work would bring along, it turned out to be one of the most amazing and biggest opportunities I have ever had. I learned so much about myself, which I have hardly ever done before. Especially not in a class. I really appreciate Sean and his opinion about my actions, and me as he is one of the most truthful and honest people I have ever met. He disregards all the unimportant stuff we always take into account and worry about, and focuses on the really important things in life, which is something I have been struggling all along. In order to keep this mind set, I will also try to keep visiting Sean on a regular basis, which means at least twice a month. I think it would both benefit us and help us to develop our skills and grow as a person; especially the interpersonal communication will see and experience a lot of new issues and tasks to be considered and worked on. For example, my culture tends to touch people in order to show agreement or recognition, however for Sean that is something very offensive. This is why I was SO honored when Sean kissed me goodbye the last time of our presentation; he went out of his comfort zone to meet my idea of affection or recognition. So I know now that I have to accept his and work on our idea of a mutual communication to not only satisfy my need but as well his need for comfort in our interaction.

Summarizing, I am very grateful for this opportunity and I hope to continue this relationship with Sean.