



Elena Leith

Majors: Creative writing, women's and gender studies

Minor: History

Activities: SAGA Art and Literary Magazine, Unabridged: English Club, Phi Beta Kappa

Internships: Editor-in-chief, SAGA

Post-grad plans: Master's in library science and information technology at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign iSchool; Book Publishing Certificate Program at the University of Denver, Colorado

“Elena has wrestled with using a critical feminist lens on a genre she loves—YA dystopian literature—but it's resulted in her growth as a thinker, and shows her commitment to empathy and social justice. A graceful creative writer, Elena has applied her skills not only to SAGA magazine, but also to insightful historical analysis, and she is dedicated to including more people in our narratives, whether fictional or records of lived experience.”

— Dr. Jane Simonsen, associate professor, history and women's and gender studies

MORE THAN I IMAGINED 2017

SENIORS REFLECT ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LOOK AHEAD

Why Augustana?

I became interested in Augustana for its creative writing program and Future Librarians group. The commute wasn't far from home, and the tuition was reasonable with scholarship money.

Are you where you thought you'd be four years ago?

Honestly, no. I never imagined the changes college opportunities could bring. I've gained an interest in Special Collections and archives, which I assumed in the beginning weren't for me. I pursued a secondary interest in publishing, and after a few classes and SAGA involvement, I find myself accepted to a program for book publishing. As a transfer, I wasn't sure what Augustana would bring to an older student, but I am confident in my decision to join the Augie community.

Who helped you get to where you are now?

My family has always been my backbone, and they will continue to be my foundation throughout my life. I'm grateful for their support. On campus, I've had the amazing support of my advisors, Dr. Jane Simonsen and Rebecca Wee, who have been my mentors, friends and counselors throughout my years here. I was fortunate enough to make wonderful friends with the amazing Tredway librarians, all of whom have been guides to my librarian career and supporters of my academic interests.

All of the professors on campus are wonderful, but I would especially like to thank Dr. Meg Gillette, who made “Moby Dick” tolerable and spirited English aficionados away for the weekend to visit Mark Twain's home. Dr. Brian Leech also inspired me to dive deeper into the world of history, sparking my interest in archival work and public history and preservation. I truly appreciate everyone on campus who has helped me.

A peak experience?

My second year, I was accepted as a co-editor-in-chief of SAGA Art and Literary Magazine. Finishing up my second year in this position, I can't help but appreciate everything my co-editors and I have accomplished. It's been a whirlwind, but having this magazine has stirred my passion and created a community of artists and creators that inspired my own writing and personal aspirations. Not only was this position an insight into the world of publishing, it was also a great opportunity for me to expand and grow as a writer and pre-professional.

What surprised you?

I'm definitely not who 15-year-old Elena thought she would be. Despite that, I'm happy being who I am. I've gone down a different road, but the journey has been beautiful despite its obstacles.

How did you use Augie Choice?

I used Augie Choice to cover costs for my Senior Inquiry project.

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What will you miss the most?

I will miss the life I've built here...the friends I've made and the community of people I've surrounded myself with. I will miss my mentors and guides, who I hope to always keep in touch with. I will miss Special Collections and my Reference Desk friends, and I will especially miss SAGA and all of the people and hard work involved. My years here were hard at times, but fun and interesting.

Advice for the Class of 2021?

Never be afraid to know your limits, but never be afraid to expand them either. Sign up for that community service project, send in your writing to SAGA, join the fencing club, and get a job or two. It might sound cliché, but college is supposed to be where you run around aimlessly.

Take care of yourself; sleep is necessary no matter what projects await, but never forget that what you are doing here is finding yourself...not figuring out your future. That's for senior year spring term. Just find where you fit and feel good, then go from there. Good luck!