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At Rhode Island PBS, RWU Alum, Interns Use Digital Resources to Support Remote Education

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. – At Rhode Island PBS, three RWU Educational Studies seniors interning under the supervision of an RWU Elementary Education alum are working hard to meet an increased demand for digital education resources in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Rhode Island PBS](#), Rhode Island's non-profit [Public Broadcasting Service](#) member television station, airs popular PBS television series along with local content produced by WBSE. At Rhode Island PBS, RWU interns work with the [Rhode Island PBS LearningMedia](#) website, a joint project with PBS and the WGBH Educational Foundation that distributes digital resources for educators based on PBS television shows.

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed typical approaches to education soon after Sarah Trudeau, senior Educational Studies major at RWU, started interning for WSBE Rhode Island PBS in January. When students began distance learning, the numbers of parents, teachers, and non-traditional educators who sought out the variety of online educational resources provided through the interactive PBS LearningMedia website skyrocketed.

“Our department has actually gotten much busier because we work in digital media. It has been really helpful to educators, whether they are fully remote,

hybrid, or in-person,” said Colleen Kenyon '05, Coordinator of Education Services at Rhode Island PBS since 2018. “With the pandemic, we saw use of the site, locally and nationally, multiply in large numbers.”

From March through May of this year, PBS LearningMedia averaged 2.8 million users per month nationally, an increase of over 96% from the previous school year. In Rhode Island, over 13,000 users generated nearly 22,000 visits to PBS LearningMedia in April alone, setting a new high-usage mark that more than tripled the previous school year's high.

At Rhode Island PBS, Kenyon, who double majored in Elementary Education and Psychology at RWU, provides free resources for educators, families, and students. She works with educators to identify segments of PBS shows that would be most useful in the classroom, and develops support materials to go along with the programming. She also offers professional development for educators using the content.

Three semesters ago, when Kenyon first reached out to her former professor Susan Pasquarelli, Professor of Literacy and English Education, about bringing RWU interns to Rhode Island PBS, Pasquarelli jumped at the opportunity.

"Colleen [Kenyon] reached out and I grabbed the opportunity in about 14 seconds, because who wouldn't want their kids to do this?" said Pasquarelli. "She knew this was a perfect opportunity to grow the Educational Studies program, so for her to offer the internship to us is a credit to her. She was an extraordinary student."

When the COVID-19 pandemic presented unique challenges, Kenyon had to use her flexibility and creativity to meet increased demand while following social distancing restrictions.

Rhode Island PBS educators used to invite children to come to the station for programming and host events at local schools and libraries. Now, they host virtual events. Kenyon and Trudeau recently collaborated on a virtual learning hour that included a screening of the new PBS KIDS show "[Elinor Wonders Why](#)" and pre-recorded segments of a school librarian reading a book and an elementary school teacher leading a lesson on building binoculars from the cardboard tubes inside toilet paper rolls.

"Although I obviously had specific majors at Roger, I felt really prepared for anything," said Kenyon. "The curveballs that were thrown my way were not difficult to handle. I was prepared to be flexible. Just being flexible and adaptable to change is key to education

in general. In the world today, we are learning just how flexible education needs to be.”

This fall semester, two more senior RWU educational studies interns, Brenna Pratte and Kaitlin Savarese, joined Kenyon and Trudeau at Rhode Island PBS.

“When we started having internships in this department at the beginning of this year, we looked to the Educational Studies program at RWU. It has been fun to reconnect with some of my professors and see what they are doing with this program,” said Kenyon. “It is a great way for us to find interns to work in our department who are not necessarily looking to work in the classroom.”

The Educational Studies major offers an alternative to the teacher certification track at RWU. Students study educational research, content, and pedagogy as they prepare to work in an educational setting outside of a traditional school.

“A lot of people don’t think of the background work that goes into education. That’s something I really want to do, and that’s why I really like the Educational Studies program at Roger,” said Trudeau. “You don’t necessarily have to teach in order to work in education.”

Pratte's focus at Rhode Island PBS is professional development. She joins Kenyon for virtual professional development sessions for educators both in and out of the classroom, and manages a Google Classroom to share resources with participants. Savarese works on the PBS LearningMedia website itself, learning how to work with the site's content management system as she uploads all the pieces necessary to build and publish a resource. Trudeau works in professional development for early childhood educators, assisting with virtual events and research. She recently was invited to join Rhode Island PBS's Education Advisory Committee.

"Everyone knows PBS, but I wanted to know how it worked from an education standpoint. I knew this internship was a step in the right direction," said Trudeau. "Showing educators how to incorporate technology and media into their classrooms in the right way is huge. PBS LearningMedia has all those resources literally built into the page. It's fantastic for any education student too, going on that page for their student teaching, especially remotely, it works perfectly."

Trudeau says that Kenyon's support has been instrumental in her success. In their weekly meetings, Kenyon always checks in to make sure that the

interns are doing well, and asks them if they have any questions.

“Colleen [Kenyon] really values my opinion,” said Trudeau. “I’ve never felt like I was an intern, I felt respected like an employee. Rhode Island PBS is so community based, with awesome communication and collaboration. It has definitely steered me in the right direction.”

"Colleen [Kenyon] embraces the interns, she teaches them, she coaches them," said Pasquarelli. "She is giving them opportunities that other internships just aren't, which is a very close mentorship."

Trudeau also credits her RWU professors with giving her the motivation and inspiration that helped her get where she is today. She has recently been offered a paid internship with Rhode Island PBS which will continue through the spring semester.

“I’ve never had a bad education professor at RWU. They have always been passionate and to the point, and always told us, ‘You are going to make a difference in the world. We have 100% faith in you.’ They made me want to stay in education,” she said.