

My VT-Shaped Podcast Script

START MUSIC

Hi! I'm Shalini Rana, a Virginia Tech student studying Creative Writing. The purpose of this podcast is to inform you more about the VT-shaped learner in the context of my own life and I hope it will supplement the current narrative I have set up about this model you have already seen in the rest of my website. This is a chance for me to talk directly to you, incoming students, university faculty members, and fellow classmates, about what it means to be a VT-shaped student and how the value that comes out of that translates to different parts of life in general. Remember, I am just an example of this type of student, not a model, so I hope to be as honest and straightforward with my narrative as possible so you can hopefully understand the value that adopting this concept could bring to a large institution like Virginia Tech. Let me first start by introducing myself a little bit.

This summer I am working as an IT intern at Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Michigan. In my position, I am creating database models, going to meetings, working with other interns, and basically experiencing the work life for the first time. I really like it so far. It might occur to you that it's a bit strange for a creative writing student to be working an IT position at a major company. I actually used to be a Business Information Technology major and earned the position through that major—but I'll share more of my intersection of different knowledge areas a bit later.

So, the question you've all been asking: what is the T-shaped learner? This is a relatively new topic of interest being discussed by leaders in industry and in higher education, and more schools are starting to adopt the T-shaped learner framework: which is basically that in addition to a student having deep knowledge in their major/discipline they should also be learning and applying different ways of thinking that cut through a variety of other disciplines in order to exhibit and practice skills in communication, project management, and critical thinking, as just a few examples. This is what the ultimate learner should look like moving forward in the 21st century, because, let's face it: we are moving into a realm where multiple skills and ways of thinking are needed to solve the world's biggest issues—such as climate change and terrorism, to only name a couple. There's no longer time to employ a one-size-fits all way of looking at things in both education AND industry. The influence this concept has on the VT-shaped learner, Virginia Tech's own adaptation of the framework, is that it can be directly applied to the unique, interdisciplinary opportunities our university has to offer—such as education abroad, service, and internships.

To put things in context, I will share my story. Coming into Virginia Tech I was a Business Information Technology major, gathering many skills in data analytics, accounting, statistics and other lucrative areas. Trying to find a sense of home at the university, I participated in an Alternative Spring Break service trip to Oak Hill, West Virginia with my freshman dorm—completely outside of my major and comfort zone at the time, but the experience was phenomenal. Personally, I became

close to students in different fields of study but also learned crucial life lessons—one of which being that some people have it a lot worse than I do, yet these same people can be some of the most compassionate individuals with so much love to give despite their situations.

For example, during my week in Oak Hill, I worked closely with an electrician, who was living in poverty, but employed by the organization our team was working with. I learned all kinds of things about different electrical tools and terminology while he was fixing up some old lights in the cafeteria of the building we were working in. During his breaks, this man would show me videos of his son and talk about his life, which I found so endearing. While I was learning about a person that grew up completely differently than how I did, I was also about to learn about the vocational trade of electrician work—something I would have never learned about at school.

I also studied abroad for a semester in Switzerland my sophomore year, still while a BIT major. By living in a foreign place for 3 months, I learned how to communicate in a different language with people I originally thought were much different than me—although the only real difference was Italian/Swiss culture compared to my very American/Indian cultural background. I saw so much beauty on the other side of the globe that I wasn't even aware existed previously.

A story I share with a lot of people is when a friend and I were traveling to a city in Italy via train and there was an young Italian guy sitting next to us. He was trying very hard to get to know us but he spoke very limited English. At first we communicated in gestures but

then the guy had the clever idea of pulling out Google translate on his iPad and we went back and forth translating phrases in order to have a conversation. This was a very entertaining and special experience that I realize I could have only gotten while being in a different country.

Fast forwarding to now, I'm a Creative Writing major with a completely different skill set under my belt—but I still use my IT skills in my internship with Ford. However, the Creative Writing English side allows me to be a more active participant in impacting Ford's culture and environment.

I think while working here, the most glaring example that has been revealed to me about why it's so important to embrace both the communication and people side AND the technical side is when I see the generational differences within Ford. The young interns at this company have a completely different mindset when working compared to the older generations that have been working at the company for 15+ years. This is not always the case, but I have noticed that me and the other interns are eager to create an energetic workplace in which we constantly move around the office to different working spaces in order to work alone or even collaborate with team members. I always find myself jumping between different desk areas to change my scenery a little bit to be with other interns to do my work throughout the day. I have not seen this as much with the older employees—a lot of them are stagnant and almost complacent in their work style, not openly-communicating much but being absorbed in the technicalities of their work. It seems that open communication and collaboration is something that the newer generations embrace more. I think this way

in which we interact with our environment comes from a mindset developed in our current university models—in which schools are becoming better at exposing us to different opportunities and people inside and outside of classes.

And not to sound too inspirational or anything, actually, cue the inspirational music:

But this is why it is important to embrace the T-shaped learner, no matter what it is called—it'll always be the same: that ability to cultivate and balance both right and left brain in order to see humanity a little more realistically, in order to come up with the most impactful solutions to make our world a better place to live. I'm not trying to preach – but as a young person, you should be aware and conscious of what you feed your brain and how that information shapes the way you think, live, and interact with others.

Right now, we live in a time where past generations have not questioned their existence enough to create true change and good in this world. It's our responsibility, or obligation, rather, to learn how to question and constantly remind ourselves never to settle for less than what gives ALL of us a better future. Innovation is one of the processes that come about from having this T-shaped way of thinking. Being an English major in a business world has taught me to constantly question the state of things outside and within me, notice complacency, and be active about the change I want to create in this world. At the same time, being a BIT major in a more creative world, has taught me the importance of hard data in moderation. We need to be careful about

our rhetoric—no one area of knowledge is better than the other. The key is for BOTH STEM and the liberal arts to be moving together like a dance in our minds. Until then, we cannot truly make this world better than we left it.

PAUSE

Well, that ends my podcast episode, thanks for tuning in everyone! I know this was an assignment and all, but who knows, I might end up making more of these in the future.

END MUSIC