

MAJOR DIFFERENCE:

WHEN THE UNEXPECTED PATH IS THE RIGHT ONE

By Erin Ryan

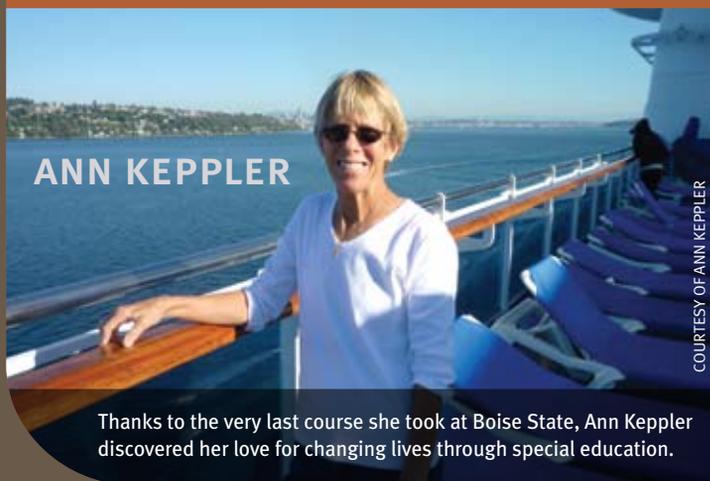


JOHN KELLY

From military history to the culinary arts, Anthony Sherwood studied just about everything before deciding to save the world through conservation biology. Here, he examines insect specimens.

BY BASIC DEFINITION, EDUCATION IS ANYTHING THAT HAS A FORMATIVE EFFECT ON AN INDIVIDUAL. IT'S NOT A TEST SCORE OR AN AWARD OR EVEN A DEGREE. IT'S AN EXPLORATION.

But when it comes to paying for college, meeting expectations and pursuing careers in a climate more competitive than ever before, many students are allowing the pressures to overshadow the experience. While there is no right way to make the most of it, the following Boise State alumni and undergraduates can vouch for the power of surrendering to the journey rather than the destination.



ANN KEPPLER, B.S., PHYSICAL EDUCATION, '85

If it hadn't been for one of her students, Ann Keppler might never have become a teacher. She was an adult swim instructor at the downtown Boise YMCA, and a student did more than encourage her to take her skills to the next level.

"She registered me for my first class at Boise State," Keppler says. "I wanted to take everything."

In addition to maintaining a work-study job and a heavy course load, Keppler swam laps with history professor Pat Bieter in the campus pool every morning. But it was another venerable Basque professor who changed her life.

"My very last class at Boise State was Education of the Exceptional School Child with John Beitia," says Keppler. "I had worked with special needs students through work-study, but to do that every day as a teacher — I suddenly knew it was what I wanted to do forever."

Upon graduating, Keppler returned to school to get certified in special education. Over the next 20 years she wove her passion for it with her love of physical education, teaching adaptive PE in Florida and coaching Special Olympians.

"There was only one good teaching job in Miami, and I had it," she says. "Special needs students are the total example of unconditional love. They live in the now and love whatever you do for them. What could be more rewarding?"

Three decades after enrolling as a Boise State freshman, Keppler is retired in Seattle. She does a little substitute teaching for fun and is back at school herself, this time for a degree in horticulture to augment the garden design company she recently started.

Keppler insists that at whatever age, students need to be open to the unexpected.

"Let yourself explore," she says. "Discover something that really gets you going."

ANTHONY SHERWOOD, BIOLOGY

Anthony Sherwood's path has been as winding as the historical landmark that enthralled him as a child. Raised by his grandparents in Ohio farm country, he played around the ancient Serpent



Mound effigy, and hearing bedtime stories about WWII and the Great Depression stoked his growing fascination with the past.

“I always enjoyed history, mainly because I was raised around it,” he says.

His grandfather’s war stories affected Sherwood deeply, and he joined the U.S. Coast Guard after earning a culinary degree from the Art Institute of Washington. Over 14 years he ran port dining facilities in Florida, Virginia, North Carolina, California, Haiti, Alaska and Washington D.C., envisioning a long military career. When an injury led to his honorable discharge, Sherwood’s wife encouraged him to return to school.

They enrolled together at Boise State. Sherwood focused on business, never imagining the science requirements he thought he hated would be the foundation of a new dream. He did well in biology but had trouble connecting to the coursework until a volunteer stint at the MK Nature Center and a trip to the World Center for Birds of Prey opened his eyes to the allure of fieldwork. He decided to take one more biology class taught by professor Merlin White.

“That was supposed to be it, but I admired how Dr. White approached biology and teaching. He got really excited about fungus, and it got me excited. I started looking things up on my own time,” Sherwood says.

The seminal moment came when graduate student Micah Scholer took Sherwood on a research trip into the Boise National Forest. The pair spent hours collecting data on owls, and Sherwood was hooked.

“My legs were so sore after the first day, but being out there brought me back to where I grew up,” he says. “I enjoy nature, and I feel like we’ve lost a lot of respect for it. I want to do conservation work with wildlife in America.

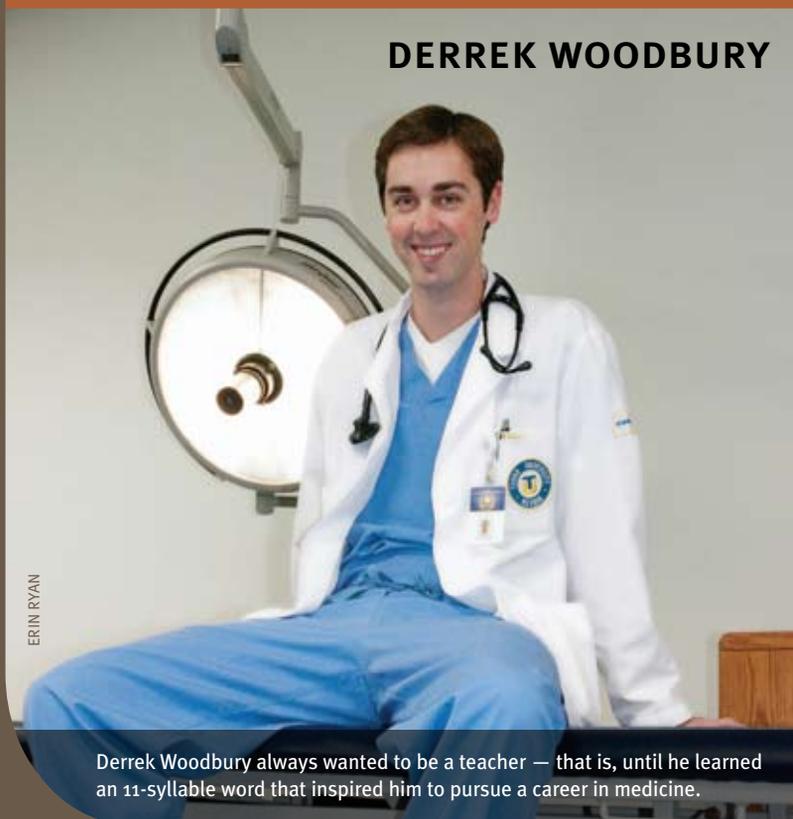
We’re such a pop culture society we don’t really look at what’s happening in our own backyard.”

Now majoring in biology with an ecology emphasis, Sherwood hopes to earn an additional degree in secondary education and a minor in history before tackling a master’s program. Achieving all of that will require serious time and dedication, but Sherwood welcomes the challenge.

“So often there’s just enough concern and discomfort involved to make someone not reach,” he says. “I plan to immerse myself in as many things as possible.”

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DERREK WOODBURY



Derrek Woodbury always wanted to be a teacher — that is, until he learned an 11-syllable word that inspired him to pursue a career in medicine.

DERREK WOODBURY, B.S., HEALTH SCIENCE STUDIES; B.A., PHILOSOPHY, '06

According to a high school career assessment test, Derrek Woodbury should be a deckhand.

“If you’re independent and like the outdoors, apparently you should be working on a ship,” he says. “One of the things it said I would not be good at was medicine.”

Now in his third year as an osteopathic medical student at Touro University Nevada, Woodbury started at Boise State as an education major. He also worked at the Department of Environmental Quality, played lacrosse and served as a student body senator. While it affected his grades, he never questioned the value of splitting his focus.

“I was paying for school myself, so taking the path of greatest interest was natural,” he said. “I was not afraid to work hard, but at the same time I was reluctant to not have a good time.”

Woodbury so enjoyed logic and epistemology that he changed his major from education to philosophy, but it was an elective that introduced him to the language of his future.

“I took medical terminology with Carol Seddon. She was a feisty Southern belle who really knew her stuff. We burned through prefixes and suffixes, word roots and meanings,” he says. “It was eye-opening as to what goes on in medicine.”

As his interest in medical science grew, Woodbury took a job as an apprentice mortician, volunteered at the Boise VA Medical Center, and worked at Boise State as an organic chemistry research assistant and teaching assistant for head and neck anatomy. The

breadth of his experience helped him get into medical school, as did a promise he made to his best friend.

“We went through physics together, talked about being docs. I was there when he went through the application process,” Woodbury says of fellow alumnus Furman Borst (AS, respiratory care, ’01), who earned a medical degree from the University of South Carolina and now is a resident in a radiology program in Memphis, Tenn. “We made a deal with each other to go for it.”

Having recently passed his first board examination and received honors on his first clinical rotation review, Woodbury is on track to graduate from Touro in 2012.

“I’ve assisted with limb amputations, been first assist on a surgery patient with HIV and part of a team that’s lost someone — so many things I never thought I would do,” he says. “A few people told me if I didn’t have a 4.0 I wouldn’t even get looked at for medical school. Others were extremely supportive, and their ability to see my potential helped me see it too.”

BETH LAYTON, GRAPHIC DESIGN

Beth Layton is an artist in two mediums, both discovered by chance.

Her first love is music, though she joined choir in the sixth grade only because she wanted to go on a field trip. In junior high, she continued because of the social perks. Then, at Borah High School, she experienced the rush of competition.

“That’s where I learned I had a real passion for it,” she says. “Our director demanded excellence, and at that higher level of performance, where you give so much of yourself, it brings your soul alive.”

Afraid that hanging her professional hopes on music would sap some of the joy, Layton was hesitant to make it her major. So she pursued an associate’s degree in general studies from BYU and took a graphic design elective because it sounded fun.

“I got really into theory and design principles and was fascinated by mixing paint with my hands, how light works with color,” Layton says. “It made sense and came naturally.”

Enrolling full-time at Boise State helped Layton take the crucial step. She was accepted into the competitive graphic design program and the Vocal Jazz Ensemble, and she has

Painted with a broad brush in both.

“Looking at a great piece of art or design gives me the same feeling as a great piece of music. It makes me want to create. I’m drawn to it not because it’s beautiful but because it speaks,” she says. “I never in my life expected I would be an art major, but part of life is figuring out who you are and what you love. Enjoy the journey.”



JOHN KELLY

The joy Beth Layton finds in music was a surprising motivator to apply her artistic expression to a degree in graphic design.