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Student Thinking in Terms of Engagement

By: Aurelia Spaulding

Louisville Senior Emily Wilcox believes that most people have the potential to do what they want to do. “But it’s a matter of whether or not they have had the experience to see it’s something they can do.”

Wilcox is one of a growing “activist community” here at WKU. She uses the term *activist community* to describe the creation and growth of student groups such as GreenToppers and Kentucky Student Environmental Coalition (KSEC), and students “loosely organizing and doing community building” outside of organizations over the past few years.

Wilcox says she has been involved in arts and activism all her life. She grew up doing art, and then participated with Do-It-Yourself (D.I.Y.) Punk Community in high school. Now, she is a student in the WKU Honors College involved in a variety of student groups.

“With that [Art] as my field, as an activist, and also as someone who feels strongly that you need to try to empower yourself and empower the people around you and actually try to make positive changes when things are going in ways you don’t want them to go, it was kind of a natural thing for me to try to find a way to marry those two [Arts and Activism].”

Bringing Arts and Activism groups to WKU was only natural for her. Wilcox started her senior year coordinating plans to bring the Bread and Puppet: Cheap Art and Political Theatre and the Beehive Design Collective to Western Kentucky University.

Wilcox worked with the Theatre Department to bring the Bread and Puppet dance company to WKU in late September. The group performed scenes relating to a variety of issues. Wilcox worked with numerous programs at WKU to provide funding for the Beehive Collective. She led a team of individuals who took part in the event held at Java City on October 7th in which countless students viewed the presentation by the Beehive Design Collective.

After meeting the members of the Beehive Design Collective at a previous event, Wilcox began corresponding with them. She found out they were going on tour through email, and immediately she began work to bring them to Western Kentucky University to share their ideas related to mountaintop removal issues.

“They use storytelling, they use pictures, and they use firsthand accounts of things that they have talked to people about with what has happened,” Wilcox said. The Beehive Designers talked to people living in the Appalachian Mountains about their experiences regarding mountaintop removal. The artwork presented on Oct 7th depicted the people’s stories from a past and present view as well as a futuristic point-of-view depicting possible solutions.

“People aren’t always sure where to start, but just knowing you can start where you are, you can start at the grassroots level with the culture around you,” Wilcox said. She uses her experiences with art to contribute to the community and believes others can do the same just by “taking

things into your own hands and deciding you're going to learn something whether or not there is someone there to teach you. That has a lot to do with empowering yourself. ”