

## In my own words

# Opportunities expand personal growth

By **Kylie Stamper**  
Staff reporter



At the beginning of November, I had the opportunity to travel to Atlanta to serve as a design team member for the Imagine What's NEXT Conference. The conference was held at the Tabernacle, an old Baptist church that was turned into a concert venue, and was aimed at college-aged students in and around the Methodist church. My duties at the conference included taking pictures, shooting video, creating social media content, and assisting with the event itself. One of the best parts: I got to go for free.

NEXT is a conference that occurs every two years. A design team is put together to help plan and run the conference. The team is comprised of college students from across the country, as well as people that work for the General Board of Higher Education and campus ministers from various colleges and universities.

The team works for close to a year in order to plan out all of the details and prepare for the conference. I joined the team this summer after expressing an interest in working with the communication team. After being accepted to the design team, I was invited to Atlanta to the summer planning meeting.

After the planning meeting, I was able to do some work throughout the semester which included creating promotional graphics that were posted on the conference's social media accounts.

To say that working the conference was an amazing experience would be an understatement. I learned things that will be very useful in a future career, I was able to observe different leadership styles. I was able to apply some of the areas of communication that I have spent the last 3.5 years studying, and I made important connections with the people I was working with. I was able to interact with other students from California, Montana, Ohio, Texas, and countless other states as well as adults from around the country. I got to see the

work of God in 700 college students and I left Atlanta knowing that I had a small part in making that happen.

I arrived in Atlanta one day before the conference began and I was able to help create a lot of the introduction videos that were used to introduce the speakers and artists. A typical day at the conference consisted of waking up early enough to leave the hotel and walk across Centennial Park to be at The Tabernacle by 7:30 a.m. The first session would start at 9 a.m. and the days were jam-packed from that point forward. I shot close to 400 photos throughout the weekend, but those photos varied from session coverage, speaker highlights, candid shots and even publicity photoshoots for some of the worship artists.

Through my work at the conference, I was introduced to opportunities where I could use my talents to serve the church in the future if I would choose to do so, but also in a job outside the church. Serving a conference with this capacity is something I would like to do again, whether that's in the same way I did this year, or as a part of a future career. As a detail-oriented person, I enjoyed getting the opportunity to work with like-minded people who were working towards the same goal.

What did I learn at the conference?

1. How to observe and interact with different leadership styles.

2. How much work and discussion goes into even the tiniest detail of a national conference.

3. Some people cannot function without coffee.

4. There should always be a back-up plan, and a leader to communicate that plan.

5. Little things can make a huge difference.

6. Wearing a walkie talkie makes you look and feel important.

The conference itself was a great experience, but to top it all off I got to experience it with several other Southwestern students including Worship Outreach, who served as the house worship band. On top of my duties with the communication team, I was also able to work with the Worship Outreach team before and during the conference to make sure their needs were met and their questions answered. Who knows, maybe I will go into band or arts management in the future! I consider myself lucky that I was able to have this opportunity to learn new things and to also have some of my closest friends there with me.

In addition to the opportunity to travel to Atlanta twice for free, I was also invited to go to Nashville two times in 2017. The Nashville opportunity comes from being on the design team. I will get to work with the United Methodist Student Movement to help re-imagine and recreate the impact of the Student Movement for future col-

lege students.

It's been said before, but I'll say it again: take advantage of the opportunities that are handed to you at Southwestern! Travel, go to conferences and see the world while you can. Get involved on planning teams and offer to work for a conference if you find appreciation in that type of work. There are opportunities out there for you to grab onto, you just have to find them. People always say that now is the best time to experience these things, when you are a young adult with nothing holding you back. That means there is nothing holding you back from leading a conference or recreating a movement or even just traveling for your own enjoyment. If you have an opportunity to travel, do it. Ten or twenty years from now, you won't want to look back and remember that you spent your entire college career in one town. You want to be able to tell stories of the time you traveled halfway across the country to work with people you didn't know, or when you attended an event that changed your outlook on being an adult. Southwestern is great, but you can't get a lot of these experiences by staying on campus for four years. Dream about what you want, go to a new place, and do something.

*Kylie Stamper is a senior majoring in communication. You may email her at [kylie.stamper@sckans.edu](mailto:kylie.stamper@sckans.edu).*



**Pictured above:** Victoria Lybarger, elementary education sophomore, Jaime Davison, philosophy & religion sophomore, Gregory Reffner, philosophy & religion senior, Kylie Stamper, communication senior, Scott Olney, computer science sophomore, Melissa McConnell, philosophy & religion junior, and Mariah Patillo, elementary education junior, all stand in front of the main stage after the conference ended. (Daniel Reffner/Courtesy Photo)