Marissa Davis: I definitely learned a lot outside of the classroom in college that I think is really transferrable to all of the things that I do now. When I started out, it was creating my own visions for something and then executing on those. Specifically, one of the first things that comes to mind is the work that I was doing in New Orleans my sophomore year of college, working Katrina happened. I was, well I was a lot of things. I was angry, I was sad, I was just disheartened by what it is that I saw before my eyes. Folks largely, low income folks of color, set aside treated different as this hurricane, or not just the hurricane it was the breaching of the levies, which is a whole other political and social issue that really compromised the wellbeing of a lot of these individuals and communities across New Orleans. Thinking about, at the time, just wanting to do something. I didn't really have a grandiose vision for what that would be for me, I just wanted to help be a part of some community of folks who are gathering supplies to go to New Orleans. Over time, that evolved into actually thinking about what my contribution could be with the access of students, or access to students that I had the resources that Swarthmore and my college had given me. Thinking about what it would take to act on those things.

One of the things that eventually came out of the work that I was doing in New Orleans was creating a self managed youth library on the west bank of New Orleans. The bigger vision for me was thinking through making sure that kids had a space to be able to do their homework, to read. After Katrina, there weren't that many spaces around but if I could just think about a plan that would actually create this space, then that would at least be one place to start. The execution of that plan ended up sending out a bunch of messages to folks all across Philadelphia while I was still at Swarthmore to get a bunch of books donated and shipped all of that to New Orleans.

By the time we had put the library together, it was over 900 books that we had gotten for ages from five up to 18 that the kinds of books that were available. Actually labeling them, categorizing them, and cataloging them so that it would be an actual library we could check in and check out. Building the bookshelves that were needed to keep all the books in order. All of that came through just thinking, all right well if I think through buying a bunch of bookshelves, I don't have the kind of money to buy really nice bookshelves but I know that there is a lumberyard somewhere in the city here. If I buy the wood and can get some people to help me build them, then I have something. It was just breaking down the different pieces that I needed to actually get the job done.

I think having had that experience, it made me more aware of how to look at a particular vision or idea and really dissect it to thinking about what is necessary to actually be on the other side of this. I think there is almost both a familiarity and understanding of someone else's vision that because I had been in the position of having my own vision and having to think about executing that, just putting myself in that person's shoes as a person with a vision. Thinking about, okay if this is how I want people to feel, or if these are my goals and outcomes by the end of this experience, what will it take to actually do that? Who do I need to reach out to? What are the resources that I need to get this done? What kind of research and investigation do I need to do and begin in order to find out more of what I need to get the job done?