*Creativity+ Interview Transcript: **Monica Lefton**, 16Ox 18C*

Introduction: My name is Monica Lefton and I was an English major at Emory. And I'm really excited to be part of *Creativity+*.

Question 1: Can you tell us a little bit about your journey (and where your headspace was at) from your Emory graduation to your current role?

Response: How I got from graduation to my current role is a little bit of luck and a pretty straight path from there. I was an English major and, senior year, I was really nervous about finding a job post-grad because I think there was a sentiment in the air that arts majors can't find full-time employment post-grad, or can't find it as easily as some of the other majors. And I definitely felt that. I worked really closely with the career counselors at the Emory Career Center. And from there, I went to different tutoring workshops and interview workshops. And I actually came across my current job posting from one of the career counselors. They encouraged me to apply and I did. And it fell in my lap from there. I took the first offer that I was given. I started the day after graduation and I've been with the firm for two and a half years since.

Moving from my English major to my current position, leaving college senior year I knew a lot of what I didn't want to do, but not a lot about what I did, which is helpful but only gets you so far. So I knew I didn't want to do the conventional–or previously conventional–English major path. I didn't want to go get a Masters. I didn't want to teach. I didn't want to be a writer–I didn't have the next great novel inside of me. And so I just really wanted to be in an environment where I could research and write a lot of more nonfiction writing, that is up my alley. And so as much as I knew what I didn't want to do, I wasn't sure what my future would look like with the skills that I did have. And I ended up finding a job in corporate PR. We're in a PR agency and I support both corporate and healthcare clients. And if you had asked me junior or senior year if I was ever going to work in a corporate office with a large agency, with a multinational organization, I would have 100% said, *That's not me, that's not my style. I want a small group. I want something that feels really creative, really local.* And I was able to find that with my current PR company's Atlanta office because it is a smaller group. And we do have a lot of clients that we support locally. And the more I was exposed to PR in my first couple months on the job, the more I found out that it really does reflect a lot of the skills that I loved from school. So it is a lot of nonfiction writing, whether it's writing press releases and/or writing media pitches, or even writing narrative summaries to go on websites or to go in reports. And it's really getting to know the clients that you support and what makes them tick and what makes them special the same way that maybe entering a class you would learn a lot about an author or a lot about a time period. But instead you get to pour that into a growing company and really help their message get out, whether it's on social media or in the newspaper. And you get to see them grow, which is really exciting.

Question 2: What were things that were unplanned/unexpected but meaningful to your growth?

Response: Between graduation and where I am now, I think one of the things that I didn't necessarily intend to fall into, but is a truth in my current role, is that I work in a very small office. And I guess looking back, that's not a surprise. I went to a relatively small high school. Emory is a small community, even on a big campus. I spent two years at the Oxford campus, which is also a very small pocket of

Emory. And although I work in a large agency with over 80 offices across the world, the Atlanta office that I work in is only about 15 people big. And so that was definitely not something going in that I planned to work at a company that small, an office that small, but it's definitely been really meaningful to my growth because it means that I get a lot of opportunity to lead projects, to try things that I normally wouldn't have tried, and to raise my hand during meetings and in rooms that an entry-level employee might not always be a part of.

Question 3: What does creativity/creative exploration/living a creative life mean to you?

Response: I think I have to remind myself often that everybody's creative process will look different and will have a different outcome. I have a lot of friends that are extremely creative and they will do paintings or make hand-sewn dresses, and things like that. And I feel like my creative process is a lot more internal. I love to read and listen and just collect things for myself. And so I have collections of journals that I actually started in Emory English classes back when it was a requirement to be writing and notating in books. And I still do that for fun. But the creative process happens really internally. So it's not necessarily something that's always showing up. But I have to remind myself that just because I don't necessarily have something that's, like, sellable on Etsy doesn't mean I'm not creative, doesn't mean that I don't value creativity. And I can tell that that process of curiosity and collection still comes out as a positive part of how I show up with my friends and at the office and the world.

Question 4: What advice do you have for your younger self?

Response: Looking back, I really wish I could have told my college self that as important as the internships and the professional experience and the skilled courses are, once you can get your foot in the door, it's really about proving your value based on the work that you deliver. I think I had a misconception that as an English major, because a lot of my classes were just academic writing classes, I would have a lot of trouble in a professional field. And I realized that once I showed up at the agency that I'm at now, a lot of the skills that I learned at Emory weren't necessarily skills based on a class syllabus, but they were skills like being able to research well, write well, staying curious, understanding how to communicate, and be both constructive and cordial with your team members. And so I think that those are skills that everybody on campus builds. And it's really being able to show your future employers that that's what you bring to the table. And it's not just the list of names or classes that is on your resume.