First-Year Seminar Shaped Alumna’s DU Experience
by Tamara Chapman

Four years ago, Paige Murray came to the University of Denver an avid reader. She graduated in June — with a bachelor’s degree in gender and women’s studies — just as passionate about reading as ever but equally as keen about writing.

So keen, in fact, that she’s determined to make writing a central part of her future. “I would like to teach writing,” she says, and with that goal in mind, she’s eyeing graduate programs that will prepare her for the challenge.

From her first quarter on campus until her last, Murray spent much of her time at DU putting words into service and honing her thoughts and ideas.

But it was a first-year seminar, known as an FSEM, that played a formative role in her DU experience. “My FSEM (Feminism and the Romance) was a cross between writing and gender and women’s studies. It really sparked with me,” she says, noting that it not only inspired her choice of major, it got her thinking deeply about how gender issues are addressed in popular culture.

“We had a lot of great conversations about writing and feminism,” she recalls. Those conversations — along with subsequent work in her major — paved the way for her senior thesis, allowing her to graduate with distinction and honors. Her work explores reimagined fairy tales in young adult literature, zeroing in on Sarah J. Maas’ “A Court of Thorns and Roses” and its reworking of the original Beauty and the Beast fairy tale, first published in 1740.

Murray didn’t confine her love of reading and writing to course work. She took a job at DU’s Writing Center, helping international students improve their academic writing. “I just tried to provide a perspective about DU’s expectations,” she says. With minors in English and communications studies, she was well versed in how to communicate clearly, argue persuasively, and support abstract ideas with rhetoric and research.

When she wasn’t refining her own papers or helping others with theirs, Murray was tending to her blog, The Paige-Turner, where she reviews — often with a feminist perspective and always with friendly, informal prose — fiction, science-fiction and fantasy works created for the young adult (YA) audience. “I really like that YA tackles a lot of different topics, and talks about them in a way that is really relatable,” she says.

“It has really turned into this place where I can talk about things I love,” Murray explains. And that love seems to be contagious. Her blog now reaches thousands of readers, so many that publishers regularly provide her with review copies, hoping to get their titles in front of her audience. Many of the blog’s followers are of high school age and still new to feminism and gender issues. Murray uses the blog to
take on some tough topics — and, through the comments section, to discuss them with individual readers. For example, in her post on “A Court of Thorns and Roses,” she criticizes the book for normalizing date rape, an observation that prompted one high school freshman to lament the prevalence of homophobic and sexist comments in some classrooms.

Murray credits her DU courses and professors with challenging her to think critically. That, in turn, gave her the confidence to share her interests and opinions on the blog — even when those opinions might challenge the conventional wisdom.

Originally from Pomona, Calif., Murray decided to enroll at DU after visiting campus on a Colorado trip that took her to several other schools. One stroll across the grounds and she was sold. “This is where I need to be,” she recalls thinking. “The campus felt very personable. Everyone seemed very relaxed.”

Her choice was confirmed after she visited some friends at other campuses with tens of thousands of students. Returning home, Murray says, “I just felt at DU that there was always a place for me.”