Possibilities of multidisciplinary studies – stories of Haaga-Helia students

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Abstract

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Today's working life increasingly requires multidisciplinary competencies. It is essential to be capable of applying skills and knowledge in practice in different fields, have courage to try new, develop oneself and to engage in cross-border cooperation. These competencies should already be developed during study time, and in the best case, hand in hand with working life.

There is a clear need for universities and higher education institutes to develop multidisciplinary study possibilities and more versatile study paths. Multidisciplinary knowledge and skills, together with theoretical knowledge, serve as a good connection to working life. This thesis was made as a part of a wider project that develops and promotes multidisciplinary study possibilities at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences.

This thesis presents experiences of former Haaga-Helia students, focusing on multidisciplinary aspects in their studies. I interviewed four Haaga-Helia students and created stories based on their experiences. Each student had a different kind of story to share. The objective was to create stories that can serve as real life examples and promote the benefits and possibilities of multidisciplinary studies. Stories have both Finnish and English versions.

The commissioning party was Communication Services of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. Finished stories were given for free use of Communication Services and they can therefore be used in Haaga-Helia's internal or external communication. They were also designed to be published in Oppariblogi, a blog where Haaga-Helia's students can find help and share experiences about their thesis projects.

This is a practice-based thesis. It consists of theoretical part and the product itself, the four stories. Theoretical part is based on storytelling in business. It covers also information about image and brand, and explains their connection to stories and storytelling. Interviews were carried out during spring 2016 and the writing process of the report was done during academic year 2016-2017. The project and report were finished and stories released for publishing during year 2017.

Keywords	
Storytelling, multidisciplinary studies, image, brand	

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1   Introduction

The project was commissioned by Communication Services of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. The contact person of the commissioning party was Communication Manager Ari Nevalainen. The main target of the thesis is to investigate and promote multidisciplinary study possibilities at Haaga-Helia. This topic is in line with Haaga-Helia's pedagogic strategy, which highlights that students must develop their ability to work in a communal way by sharing knowledge and know-how (Haaga-Helia 2017d). By cooperating across boundaries and together with students from other degree programmes, students can share their knowledge and know-how amongst other students. In other words, cooperate multidisciplinary.

The thesis topic is also important to the students. According to recent thesis studies made about multidisciplinary studies (Saaristo 2016; Kilpijärvi 2016), Haaga-Helia students are not very well aware of the possibilities of multidisciplinary learning. In the interviews of this thesis, the same fact became apparent. The concept and possibilities of multidisciplinary studies and cooperation are quite unfamiliar, and there is a clear need for more approachable information about the topic. Haaga-Helia uses stories in its communication, and this way the thesis and its products follow well Haaga-Helia's and the commissioning party's communication purposes.

1.1   Objectives and demarcation

The original initiative for this thesis project arose during a cross-programme thesis group steering committee meeting, on 11 May 2015 from Teemu Kokko, then vice president, present president of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. There appeared to be a general need to develop multidisciplinary study opportunities and functions at Haaga-Helia. After this Haaga-Helia started looking for a student to implement an interview study to investigate the experiences and opinions of students that have followed a multidisciplinary study path. As said, the need arose straight from the organization, which also became the commissioning party.

The purpose of this thesis was to find out what kind of impressions and experiences former students of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences have about multidisciplinary studies and thesis projects. The stories were meant to help other Haaga-Helia students to realize what multidisciplinary studies really are in practice. One goal is to inspire students and open their eyes for alternative ways to study and write their thesis, promoting multidisciplinarity as an option. There was a need for real-life stories of students that have worked in cooperation with students from other degree programmes, or otherwise fol-

lowed a multidisciplinary study path. The stories are a way to explain abstract concepts in a practical and more understandable way. The goal was to create the stories as a part of the renewing process of cross-programme thesis groups and multidisciplinary studies at Haaga-Helia. Stories are planned to be a good and important way of informing students about these kinds of study possibilities.

In this project, the focus group was defined as a group of four students, selected by the commissioning party. The interviewed persons had different specialization areas and study paths. The key factor choosing these students was their personal success story and the motivation that their story could generate among other students. There are no earlier studies made at Haaga-Helia concerning this particular topic, from this perspective of view and in English.

1.2   Methods and structure

This is a product-oriented and practice-based thesis. It consists of two main parts that complement each other: the thesis report and the operative part. The report includes a theoretical part that brings the product together with relevant theorical background knowledge. The stories, which have versions in Finnish and English, were created as a result of the operative part. The whole work consists of the knowledge base consisting of literature, project description and the concrete result, the stories. After project description I present the stories, and end the report with discussion that analyses the results and the project itself. Inside the text the stories are presented in English. The original Finnish versions can be found as appendix at the end of the report in their recommended publication form.

Material was collected by using semi-structured theme interviews. Interviews were recorded, documented and used as a basis material for the stories. The interviewing method was in line with the project's objective - to create stories that express interviewees' experiences. The theoretical background links together storytelling in business and the importance of image and brand, and describes the connection of these factors. It tries to explain the important connection that storytelling has to various fields in business.

2 Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences and multidisciplinary studies

Haaga-Helia was formed at the beginning of 2007 with Finland's first merger of institutions of higher education, as Helsinki Business Polytechnic and Haaga Institute Polytechnic joined forces. Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences is one of the biggest Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland and is constantly trying to improve and develop the ways of teaching and studying. Haaga-Helia is part of the Finnish public educational system, privately run but steered and co-funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (Haaga-Helia 2017a).

The fields of education are business, hotel, restaurant and tourism management, information technology, journalism, management assistant training, sports management, and vocational teacher education. The university prepares professionals for working life through education, research and development. At Haaga-Helia students are offered a versatile choice of studies and specialisation, both in Finnish and English (Haaga-Helia 2017a).

2.1 Haaga-Helia's strategy and communication

Haaga-Helia's mission is to open doors to future careers and vision is to be the most attractive and professionally oriented Finnish institution of higher education. The university wants to offer quality education with a human touch. This is enabled by enthusiasm and know-how of the students and the staff, international growth together with partners and new digital solutions in services and operations. All above-mentioned comes down to the institution's value foundation; Haaga-Helia serves and revitalizes the business community by working together responsibly and sustainably (Haaga-Helia 2017b). It is safe to say that multidisciplinary studies and career paths are an essential part of implementing this strategy.

When taking a look at Haaga-Helia's website or social media, it can quickly be noticed that the university uses a lot of stories in its communication. According to Haaga-Helia's Communication Manager Ari Nevalainen (Saaristo 2016, 26), Haaga-Helia builds its marketing campaigns quite often on students and their career stories. This gives the stories an important role in Haaga-Helia's overall marketing communication. This can be noticed on Haaga-Helia's website; career stories are used in different kind of campaigns, social media, and applicant's guide. Haaga-Helia uses stories also to present different degree programmes and to promote career possibilities after graduating.

Haaga-Helia has been using career stories in the marketing since year 2011. The scope has been varying; sometimes the focus is more on the stories and sometimes they are part of a greater entity or campaign. The elements of the stories are considered carefully, in order to serve the right purpose. With the help of the stories, studies can be made more concrete while marketing Haaga-Helia's educational selection (Saaristo 2016, 26). Communicating with stories and storytelling also comply with Haaga-Helia's strategy.

2.2   Multidisciplinarity at Haaga-Helia

In the context of this thesis and Haaga-Helia, multidisciplinary studies and multidisciplinarity is understood as cooperation between different fields and degree programmes. An individual can combine one's own personal knowledge and skills in a multidisciplinary way. Equally, several parties can cooperate multidisciplinary, and bring together different knowledge and skills from different fields.

The cooperation between different higher education institutions enhances multidisciplinarity. Helsinki Metropolitan Universities of Applied Sciences, Haaga-Helia, Laurea and Metropolia, have initiated cooperation to deepen their partnership in specific strategic cooperation areas. Together the universities are developing ways to promote education export, research and development, student mobility, and innovation and entrepreneurship.

> The partnership draws from each institution's unique educational profile and identity. The Helsinki metropolitan area needs higher education institutions with distinctive profiles that respond to the region's skills needs. To this end, the institutions are focusing on a strategic partnership that will benefit both students and employers. (Haaga-Helia 2017a.)

The president of Haaga-Helia, Teemu Kokko, describes this cooperation as a new possibility that enables real cross-border cooperation between different fields (Kokko 28 January 2016). This gives students possibility to learn and study in a more multidisciplinary way. According to Kokko, strong operational integration is happening in working life, which can be seen as new multifunctional roles and tasks that are defined in real time. At individual level this creates the need for multitasking skills and ability to take over new areas of knowledge. He points out that at Haaga-Helia the transition towards multidisciplinarity can already be seen in the study and course selection that contain multidisciplinary aspects and possibilities. Kokko thinks that so called "crazy combinations" can often reveal new and innovative possibilities.

All Haaga-Helia's degree students complete a Bachelor's thesis as a part of their studies. Thesis can be a research project or a product-oriented study. Most theses are completed to serve a commissioning company's operational needs (Haaga-Helia 2017e). One option is to complete the thesis as a part of a larger entity, in a cross-programme thesis group.

Cross-programme thesis groups are formed for thesis writers around a larger common topic area, possibly commissioned by an organization. Thesis groups are multidisciplinary and involve more than one programme. Students from any programme can take part in these groups. The main objective is to combine knowledge and expertise to serve both professional life and universities of applied sciences. Cross-programme thesis groups gather together students from different programmes to study the same topic area from different perspectives. Groups also offer topic ideas or help to focus further on the topic. In a group, an individual thesis becomes part of a larger whole (Haaga-Helia 2017c).

2.3 Multidisciplinary competencies in working life

As Minna Hiillos, the Deputy President and Director of Business Programmes of Haaga-Helia, reflects in her blog post (12 September 2016), today's changing working life requires skilful multitaskers. She makes some important observations about the importance of these skills in working life. Multidisciplinary skills consist of three main things: the right attitude, constant learning and cooperation. The right attitude consists of interest and courage to try, being ahead and noticing the benefits. Learning is associated with stepping out of the comfort zone and having a sense of modesty in front of the change. Cooperation is all about excellent communication skills. Hiillos notes that the importance of multidisciplinary skills, together with constant learning and cooperation, has also been recognized at Haaga-Helia.

Fundamentally, multidisciplinarity is cooperation. According to the National Working Life Development Strategy to 2020 (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2012, 9), deeper cooperation is also required today between the companies' own personnel, partners and customers. In the times of uncertainty, trust and cooperation are even more important. According to the strategy, promoting cooperation and networking across sectorial boundaries and boundaries between workplaces have become development areas of Finnish working life.

Both Hiillos' post and the strategy reveal the presence of constant change and uncertainty in today's working life. This is why multidisciplinary competencies and adaptability can be seen as important assets that will be even more valued in the future.

3 Storytelling, image and brand

Storytelling is present in every organisation and involved in communication, image management, and branding more than one might realize. Stories can be quite powerful tool, especially in communication and marketing. For this reason, it is important for organisations and companies to know how and when to use stories and to realize the value of good storytelling.

It is quite obvious that online texts and the fast-paced communication in social media have influenced the way we read texts and receive information. In order to reach the target audience and to get the message delivered, the information needs to be put in a form that is interesting for the receiver – and stories are often just that. Good, interesting content and functioning stories are therefore more important than ever in every day's communication. Stories can be a big help when defining an organisation's identity and reputation. Companies can make use of stories in many ways, both in their internal and external communication (Aula & Mantere 2005, 60–63).

3.1 The power of stories and storytelling

Good business storytelling is realistic and helps to implement the values in real life. Values cannot be just talk (Rauhala & Vikström 2014, 196). Stories are an excellent way to make company's values concrete and more understandable. The power of stories consists of different factors. Most importantly, stories offer relatable explanations and meaning. As humans we want to understand things and make sense of this world. Stories can often be the answer to this fundamental urge for interesting explanations (Rauhala 6 May 2015).

Storytelling is actually multidimensional interaction. Stories demand more concentration and activity from the listener than pure facts. The meaning is actually built on the listener's own experiences and perspective. Empathy and understanding of the audience is the basis of everything – stories are not only told, they are shared and lived. Storytelling can be seen as listening, sharing meanings and serving the listeners – "story sharing". (Rauhala 20 September 2015.) Company's core story and its content, storytellers and storytelling channels form company's "story capital". The easiest way to realise this capital is to intentionally produce stories that resonate in the community or audience. Even better would be to create and live the story together with the community or customers (Rauhala & Vikström 2014, 189). Clearly, this kind of engagement to the story makes the story and its message more powerful.

3.2   Storytelling in business

Stories are helpful in many areas of business, depending on the goal and purpose of the story. Story can be used to present abstract things in an understandable way and to visualize ideas. The table below (Table 1.) describes the different ways stories can be used and the benefits that storytelling can offer. Table shows the objectives and effectiveness of storytelling in three different fields: Leadership and Organisational Development, Marketing and Communication. Objectives are the optimal results that can be reached by using stories in the field in question. Effectiveness describes the ways stories can affect when used properly.

Table 1. How to use stories and explain their effectiveness in different fields, adapted from original version (Rauhala & Vikström 2014, 33-31)

Field	Objectives	Why story is effective
Leadership and Organisational Development	• Inspiring and motivating people • Raising the willingness for change • Building the corporate culture • Building and communicating future scenarios • Creating strategy	• It motivates • Helps to understand the purpose of change • Stories can function as community's social glue and increase employee engagement
Marketing	• Influencing mental images • Building and leading brand • Understanding customer experience • Generating purchasing situation	• Appeals to the feeling that captures attention • Strong brand requires emotional bond, and story appeals to feelings
Communication	• Effective message delivery • Comprehension and informing • Interaction with interest groups • Explaining complicated things simply	• Helps to remember and understand • Attracts interest • Helps to make abstract things more concrete

3.3 Corporate image, reputation and brand

The image of a corporation or organisation is closely related to identity and reputation of the company. The image consists of all the impressions that an individual, society and interest groups have about the company or organisation. Reputation, compared to image, is an impression that is formed during a longer period of time. It consists of deeper impressions and is therefore harder to change and be affected than image (Vuokko, P. 2003. 103). As its best, story is a bridge between company's identity and external brand (Rauhala & Vikström 2014, 189).

The image is developed whether the company or organisation is consciously building it or not. The company cannot totally control the image, only to try to affect it. This is why every organisation should reflect the ways of affecting their image and to be aware of the image that their interest groups already have (Vuokko 2003, 105). Every company and organisation has a story, and stories can be used as a foundation of the desired image and in strengthening the reputation. The image consists of several different factors, as shown in the figure (Figure 1.) below.

Image is created from several elements, and some of them the company or organisation can directly influence. These elements; audience's information, experiences, and observations, are described on the right side. When trying to modify and create the image, these are the areas that companies and organisations should focus on. The factors that cannot be directly influenced are described on the left side. These elements are values, attitudes, prejudices, and beliefs of the audience, and are harder to change (Vuokko 2003, 111).
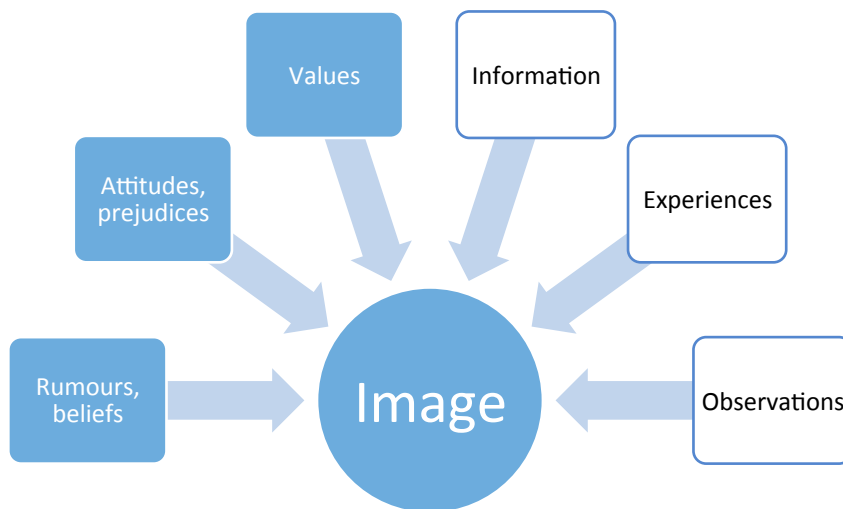
Figure 1. The elements of corporate image (Vuokko 2003, 111)

3.4 Brand

Brand can be defined in multiple ways. Simplified, brand is a specific name, label, symbol or form that identify a certain product and help to distinguish from competitors. Brand is added value. It does not develop in the market itself; it develops in the audiences' head and from peoples' experiences. As a concept and asset it is very intangible, and only controllable to a certain point (Vuokko 2003, 120).

Brand does not concern only concrete products or goods. Also organisations, or higher education institutes like Haaga-Helia, need to take brand and image into consideration. According to Haaga-Helia's president Teemu Kokko (Kokko 22 September 2017), a higher education institution's activities can be measured in many different ways. The quality of performance can be evaluated from qualitative perspective, by economic efficiency or also by measuring the market position by brand and visibility. This points out the importance of brand also when building a higher education institutes image and defining its reputation. Branding is important, both for products and services.

4　From interviews to stories – the project

This is the empirical part of the thesis. In the following text I present the starting point, target, objectives, and development areas of the thesis. I justify the need and purpose of the project and explain how the project serves the objectives and also the commissioning party. The project description explains the development and trajectory of the whole process and gives more detailed information about how the project was carried out from beginning to end. The methods are introduced in a separate subsection. In the methods I focus on the interview method and collection of material for the stories.

4.1　Starting point, target and objectives

There was a clear need for the project, and the initiative arose straight from the Haaga-Helia's management. This project answers the need to develop multidisciplinary study opportunities and functions at Haaga-Helia. It was also part of a wider developing process of multidisciplinary studies at Haaga-Helia. The form of the project was defined right in the beginning, and the commissioning party had a clear picture of what kind of product it wanted as a result. The project was also made open for furher development and to offer an example for possible similar projects carried out at Haaga-Helia in the future.

The main objective was to create success stories about multidisciplinary study possibilities to inspire other students. The target of the stories was to give clearer picture of what multidisciplinary studies can be in practice, and especially how multidisciplinary studying is possible in Haaga-Helia. It was important to be able to explain the concept itself in a practical and more understandable way. Another more general goal was to participate in improving and developing Haaga-Helia's functions in general. As Haaga-Helia is highly international and topic concerns students of all degree programmes, it was important to have research information available also in English. This can be included as one of the objectives – producing information about the topic in English. It was desirable that the stories could be a new channel for informing students about multidisciplinary study possibilities.

4.2　Project description

As a starting point, the current situation was mapped and defined. This was a way to become conscious of the possible problems and areas of development that need to be taken in consideration during the project. Also couple of other thesis projects were done around the same theme, as a part of a multidisciplinary study possibilities' developing process at Haaga-Helia. These separate studies took all different approaches, and were meant to

complement each other. This thesis was planned to complete this greater entity as well, taking a specific perspective of view.

As the current situation and needs were defined, the project and its focus itself became clearer. There was a need for real-life stories of students that have worked and written their thesis multidisciplinary or in cooperation with other students, or otherwise studied "across degree programme borders".

The commissioning party chose the interviewees, and all the interviews were done and recorded during spring 2016. After collecting the material by interviews, I created each story based on each student's personal experiences about multidisciplinarity in their studies. On the side, the interviewees were given the possibility to give feedback for Haaga-Helia and propose possible improvements to the study system and possibilities.

Transformation of the interviews to stories was done during academic year 2016-2017. I wrote the stories using guidelines from the commissioning party so that they fit the organisation's purpose and were similar to other stories used in Haaga-Helia's communication. There was no certain word limit for the stories, but they needed to be short and concise and in an easy-readable form. The interviewees and Ari Nevalainen, the representative of Communication Services of Haaga-Helia, verified and checked all the stories before publishing. All the interviewees were given the possibility comment on the stories. Some corrections and alterations were made at this point, in order to make sure that all the facts were straight. This way I also ensured that information in the stories was correct and that the stories were suitable for Haaga-Helia's communication purposes.

Stories were designed to be published in Haaga-Helia's Oppariblogi as Finnish and English versions. Oppariblogi is a blog focusing on stories of Haaga-Helia students, a channel for sharing information and experiences of students working on their thesis project. The aim of the blog is to encourage fellow students that are planning or doing their own thesis. The blog is a creation of Haaga-Helia students as a result of a Marketing Communication course. Students made all the stories and interviews behind them. The stories created in this thesis are therefore relevant and new material for the blog. The finished stories were given for free use of Communication Services and they can be used in Haaga-Helia's internal or external communication. As an exception, one of the interviewees gave permission to publish the story only in Oppariblogi and internal communication channels.

4.3   Methods

Material was collected by semi-structured theme interviews and interviewing style was narrative. As mentioned before, this project covers four different interviews. All the interviews were done face-to-face and recorded. The interviewing language was Finnish, since it was more natural for the interviewer and interviewees. They were also implemented in a same way and based on the same question pattern. The interviewing questions can be found as appendix at the end of this report, both in Finnish and English. Because of the semi-structured nature of the interview there was no strict order for the questions, and the discussion between interviewer and interviewee was free. The discussion and questions covered mainly students' multidisciplinary thesis project or multidisciplinary studies during their study time at Haaga-Helia. Working life aspects and students' current situations were also covered during the interview. The emphasis of the interview topics varied depending on each interviewee and their personal situation.

Theme interview is composed of preliminary chosen themes and elaborating questions. It can be placed as its formality between structured questionnaire interview and unstructured, open interview. In theme interview the interview does not follow detailed and clearly formulated questions. It is more open to new ideas and gives the interviewee the possibility to talk and answer more freely. The discussion focuses on certain topics, and the interviewer might have certain topics and questions that the interview is based on. The themes and topics are the same for all interviewees, but the topic order and pace of the interview can vary according to each interviewing situation (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2001, 47-48, 66; Eskola & Suoranta 200, 86-87). In a theme interview the point is to take into account the interviewees experiences and give space also for free speech within the topic.

I recorded the interviews in order to be able to better communicate with the interviewees during the interviews and to get the most of the interviewing situation. Recording gives the possibility to go back to the interview, and functions as a "memory" and tool for interpretation. Sometimes when listening the recordings afterwards, the true meaning of the answers become clearer and the researcher can do some new observations about the interview (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2009, 107). The collected data was written out after each interview. The recordings were freely transcripted in general language. After transcription, the stories were written based on these transcription drafts. First the stories were created and finished completely in Finnish, and then translated and modified to English.

5 Stories of Haaga-Helia students

In this section, I present the product of this thesis that is the four stories that I created based on the interviews. To make the report more readable, the following text includes only the English versions of the stories. The original Finnish versions can be found as appendix at the end of the report. The Finnish versions also include a picture of each interviewee. The stories were created to be success stories that inspire other students. I tried to write the stories in a form that is relatable and interesting for the target audience. The emphasis is on the students' own experiences and how they benefitted from multidisciplinary studies at Haaga-Helia of University of Applied Sciences. Each story follows more or less the same structure: introduction, background information of the person and multidisciplinary aspects in their studies and working life. In conclusion, I present important observations based on the interviews and some of the feedback and development ideas I got from the students.

5.1 Anni Sihvola

Cooperation between different degree programmes

Anni studied in the Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants, specializing in Leadership and HR. Having earlier completed business studies on vocational level, she started her BBA studies in spring 2014 and graduated in Christmas 2015. Besides studying she worked as an assistant in a technology company, and after graduating she continued working as an entrepreneur in another company of the same field.

When starting to work on her thesis, it felt natural for Anni to look for a topic from her own employer. She wanted to learn new skills and do something concrete and useful. By coincidence, another student from Haaga-Helia happened to be working in the same company. He was also finishing his studies of information technology, and together with Anni they got an idea to get a joint thesis project from their employer. As a result they carried out a multidisciplinary project that combined the skills and knowledge of the two students from different fields.

The commissioning party was a technology company that provides distant customer service machines that enable distant customer service with real time communication. The task was to replace and renew the old and slightly complicated user interface and this way simplify the work of customer service persons.

Working together they learned new skills from each other and got both to use their own strengths. Anni's companion was mainly responsible of the technical part and the actual implementation of the user interface. Anni herself had a more humane-oriented approach to the topic – she took care of the communication, contacts and collection of user experiences from employers. During the project Anni learnt a lot about the technical side and use of different programs. She felt that together with her fellow student they complemented each other very well.

Anni thinks that multidisciplinary cooperation project was a good choice. It was work-oriented and taught new skills in practice. After finishing the project, she was especially happy about the positive feedback from the company and the real usefulness of the project. She was excited to see how her studies and work could be linked: "It feels that everything I have learned can be applied in the working life".

5.2 Anna Nurkse

Personal multidisciplinary skills as a key to success

Anna is a former and present Haaga-Helia student with a diverse studying and working background. After Finnish Matriculation examination, she has completed a vocational qualification for Information technology, a BBA degree and a degree in Specialist Qualification in Management. Now she studies her fifth degree in Haaga-Helia's Master's Degree Programme for Information Systems Management.

Anna has been working ever since she graduated as an HSO-secretary in 1995. She has successfully built a career and advanced in the IT-field. A couple of years ago Anna noticed that she could update the old HSO-secretary degree to a BBA degree at Haaga-Helia. She started in-service studies in degree programme for Multilingual Management Assistants in 2014. For her, this was a much-needed way to later continue IT-studies in the Master's level.

In her thesis, Anna was able to combine her personal multidisciplinary skills and interests successfully. Back then she worked as a superior for a 30 personnel unit in a firm that produced intranets, amongst other things. She was inspired by Haaga-Helia's strategy course and wanted to research how strategy and its practical implementation could be connected to social intranet.

The idea was to investigate social intranet as a supporting tool for strategic communication. Work was multidisciplinary and combined business administration and implementing

strategy. Information system knowledge was involved through the social intranet. The work was a survey and interview study from management assistant's point of view. It combined also Anna's personal knowledge and skills obtained from earlier studies and working life. "Combining knowledge from two different fields is also important in today's working life".

Anna found the multidisciplinary aspect as a positive thing. At first, it was a bit challenging to narrow down the topic. After finding the focus, the result turned out to be a successful multidimensional work that was very useful for the target group. Many of Anna's interests combined in the thesis: "It was very rewarding. I learnt a lot of my own work and made a lot out of the project".

5.3   Arvo Perälä

Multidisciplinary studies leading the way to future

Arvo studied in the Degree Programme for International Business, specializing in Financial Management. He started his studies in January 2014 and graduated at the end of year 2016. Before BBA studies he had completed also bachelor's extent of theological studies. Arvo made the most out of the studying possibilities at Haaga-Helia and he is a good example of a student that has developed his skills in a multidisciplinary way.

Arvo took a whole bunch of interesting courses, also from course selections of other degree programmes. By combining courses from different programmes, he felt that he got a wider view and versatile knowledge. He liked the fact that the focus and approach in the courses varied depending on the degree programme.

Arvo deepened his IT-skills by taking courses of information management, both from IT and Financial programmes. In addition to his own specialization area, he studied extra courses from two other specialization areas, Human Resource Management and Finance. He had a clear vision behind this: "I wanted to get a unique mix of skills in order to be more competitive in the job market".

Arvo had many topics in mind for thesis. Eventually he got a project from a familiar organization, Suomen vapaakirkon nuoret Ry. He had been participating their activities and noticed a need for focusing and sharpening in some functions. Inspired by this he ended up developing and implementing the organisation's strategy as his thesis project.

Arvo planned a balanced scorecard; a strategy performance management tool that can be used to follow and measure strategy implementation from four different perspectives: financial, customer, internal business process and learning. As one might imagine, the thesis was multidisciplinary combining accounting, business administration and information technology. Both Arvo and the organisation were satisfied with the result: "It appears that many things were done successfully in this project".

5.4   Sini Kervinen

Multidisciplinary skills as an asset in working life

Sini's path at Haaga-Helia begun in year 2004, when she started information technology studies. Later she has completed Specialized Studies for Profitable Supervisory Duties and also started Master´s Degree studies on Information Systems management in the beginning of 2017.

For Sini, studying has always gone hand in hand with work. She has constantly widened her personal skills and built a successful career in the process. Sini is an inspiring example of how to implement multidisciplinary knowledge in practice. "I want to entrench my learning in practice. That is why it has been very important to me to always work at the same time".

Sini's BBA studies were multidisciplinary, combining information technology, insurance field specialization studies, sales and entrepreneurship. Her thesis was also multidisciplinary combination of sales and information technology. Thesis was commissioned by Sini's own employer and made in cooperation with another student. The objective was to research what is the best combination of advertisements and the media environment. Sini took care of implementation of the survey and analysed the results and her companion focused on the market prospects. Project was successful and both students got to use their own strengths.

After Haaga-Helia Sini has earned credit in several fields. She has taught coding, run her own small businesses and studied the qualifications of Wellness Mentor and Life Coach. She also holds a respected position as the Chairman of the Board of IAB Finland, an organization that promotes and raises the use of digital marketing and advertising.

Now Sini is a data and digital marketing professional. After graduation, she worked at Sanoma in various positions. From there she continued to work at her present employer Aller Media. She started working with online-advertising development projects but in two

years she has advanced and become a data and digital marketing specialist with supervisory duties.

Sini thinks that the studies at Haaga-Helia give students many possibilities: "Studies here give an excellent basis and abilities to continue further, depending on one's own interests and enthusiasm.

5.5 Observations

The objective was to investigate what kind of multidisciplinary aspects students had and how they had experienced studying. Focus was also on their possible multidisciplinary thesis work. All interviewees experienced multidisciplinary aspects in their studies and thesis mainly as a positive thing. Backgrounds varied; two of the students, Nurkse and Kervinen, had already been in working life quite a long time and have wider experience of combining their knowledge into practice in work. Sihvola and Perälä represented students that are in the beginning of their path in working life.

All the interviewees did their thesis for a familiar organization or company, which gave them an opportunity to connect studies with working life. Students were overall satisfied with their studies at Haaga-Helia. This appears from their positive comments and from the fact that two of them had also continued to study in Haaga-Helia's Master's Programmes.

Common motivator for multidisciplinary studies and thesis project was to gain concrete and useful knowledge that serves also in the working life. They also wanted to learn new and in a way to gain special mix of knowledge combining studies of different fields. In other words, these students really wanted to make the most of the study possibilities at Haaga-Helia.

5.6 Feedback and development ideas

In the interview the students were also asked for some feedback and possible advice for other students, mainly concerning multidisciplinary studies and possibilities at Haaga-Helia.

Some challenges arouse, for instance the information seemed to be quite hidden. Two of the students in particular mentioned the difficulties in finding the relevant information about different study and thesis possibilities when it comes to multidisciplinary studies. Some of the students suspected that students in general are not that aware of multidisciplinary possibilities, because the information is hidden and therefore the concept is quite

vague and unknown. In their opinion, information should be more accessible and put into clearer form. According to the interviews, there is information available, but one must know where to find it and gather it piece by piece from different sources. One student mentioned the lack of common thesis guidelines for students that cooperate or do a joint thesis project with a student from different degree programme. According to Anni Sihvola (2016), it was challenging to adapt her project in a right form since her and her partner were from different degree programmes, and had different guidelines for the thesis plan and report. All interviewees felt that they had benefitted from the multidisciplinary studies or thesis project, and were happy to be able to combine their own expertise and knowledge in practice in working life.

6   Discussion

In this final chapter of the thesis I discuss the results and implementation of the project. I form some general conclusions on the basis of the results, present development ideas and suggestion for further research. I analyse the achievement of the targets and I reflect how the results serve the set thesis objectives. Finally, I evaluate my own learning during the process and discuss overall experiences about the whole thesis project – both operational part and the writing process.

6.1   Conclusions and achievement of the targets

The objectives of the project were met. Interviews and gathered information served the purposes and needs of the commissioning party. On the side, new useful information was found about the main topic, multidisciplinary studies at Haaga-Helia. The need for the project arose in spring 2015 and discussions about the topic started during autumn 2015. Interviews were implemented during spring 2016 and writing process during academic year 2016-2017. The results and stories were finished for use of the commissioning party during year 2017. Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences can use this study straight through the created stories. They are made for communication purposes and are meant to be part of the tools that commissioning party can use in further communication and when sharing information to the students.

The main target was to create success stories that promote multidisciplinary study possibilities at Haaga-Helia. The interviewing method, semi-structured theme interview served this target very well. Relaxed interviewing situation and relevant question pattern helped to get a truthful picture of interviewees' experiences and gave possibility to create realistic stories. The target was to create stories with different perspective of view, and this goal was also met well since the students were all in a different positions in their study path or career. In conclusion, the project was completed successfully. According to the comments, the results satisfied everyone; the commissioning party, the interviewees and the researcher. The main objective was met and stories successfully represent real-life success stories of students who benefitted from multidisciplinary studies at Haaga-Helia.

6.2   Development ideas and feedback

There are always some possibilities for improvement in every research. In this case, it might have been good to get more interviewees. This would have helped to get wider perspective on the topic, and given possibility to make general assumptions based on the results. The results, experiences and feedback themselves now only represent a couple of

students and therefore cannot be generalized. It is good to notice that this was not actually the aim of this theses – the objective was to create stories in order to share information and gather successful example stories. That purpose the amount of interviewees served well.

Students could have been each from different degree programme and the study could have included also international students. This would have given an interesting addition to the spectrum of stories, and more truthful picture of representatives of the institution's students. I was not personally in charge of choosing the interviewees and could not therefore influence that much to the variety of the interviewees.

After publishing these stories it would be interesting to see and investigate how the information flow inside Haaga-Helia; how the stories will reach students and if the students will better understand the concept of multidisciplinary learning. Possible developments in the topic could be investigated again in a couple of years to see if there is any change.

6.3 Evaluation of the process and learning

The process and learning results were very versatile. I got to do interviews and communicate with different stakeholders: commissioning party, interviewees and other parties included. Translating the stories and writing the report in English significantly developed my language skills. The whole interviewing process itself developed my interviewing skills; how to prepare, lead the discussion and keep the topic around wanted subject. I also got a chance to develop my writing and storytelling skills, and gained wider understanding of how to use stories in different contexts.

There were some challenges that are common for students doing their first academic research project. The most challenging parts were the time management and dividing the work, transferring from different phases to the final result. Finishing the project and report was the most time-consuming part of the process. I found the project very educational - I learned to overcome obstacles and especially to develop working methods for myself. I grew academically and learnt to work independently with a large and time-consuming project. Professionally I gained knowledge in the area of marketing communication and storytelling. This was my first independent research project. At times writing and maintaining the common thread was challenging, but during the process I learned a lot. This project helped me to overcome some time management problems and taught how to work independently.

The process might have been slow-paced but the result was successful. All the stories were read and approved by the interviewees and checked by the commissioning party before finishing and putting them in their final publication form. This ensured that information was reliable and that the stories really do express the true opinions and experiences of the interviewed students. This gave confirmation for the fact that the project was successfully completed. In conclusion, this thesis project gave me possibility to create new information, gain new knowledge and develop my own professional skills.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interviewing questions in English

Date, time and place:
Recorder:
Name of the Interviewee:

Studies at Haaga-Helia UAS
- In which degree programme did you study, what was your specialization area?
- Duration of study time, starting and graduation year?
- Education/other degrees before and after Haaga-Helia

Current situation
- Did you move into working life straight after your studies?
- If yes, did that work place have a connection to your studies (e.g. through internship, thesis or other projects)
- Current occupation, title, employer
- Tell freely about your working history after graduation.

Thesis
- What was the topic of your thesis?
- Where did the idea come from?
- How long did the thesis project take altogether?
- Tell freely about the topic and project itself

Multidisciplinary studies or thesis project
- Did you do cooperation of any kind in your thesis project (multidisciplinary; were other students involved)?
- If yes, how did the cooperation work in practice (workload, writing, etc.) and how did you experience it?
- How were multidisciplinary possibilities and aspects involved in your studies overall?
- Did you study take courses from other degree programmes?

Advantages and disadvantages
- Tell freely how was your overall experience about multidisciplinary studies / thesis project?
- Based on your experience, would you recommend this way of working to other students?
- Haaga-Helia is developing its multidisciplinary study possibilities and wants to encourage students to study more multidisciplinary. What do you think about this?
- Any other thoughts, comments, feedback concerning to this topic? Tell freely.

Closing the interview and informing the interviewee of how the project proceeds.

Appendix 2. Interviewing questions in Finnish

Päivämäärä, aika ja paikka:
Äänittäjä:
Haastateltavan nimi:

Opinnot Haaga-Heliassa
- Missä koulutusohjelmassa opiskelit?
- Valmistumisvuosi ja tutkinnon kesto?
- Muu koulutus ennen ja jälkeen Haaga-Helian?

Nykytilanne
- Siirryitkö työelämään suoraan opintojesi jälkeen?
- Jos kyllä, oliko kyseisellä työpaikalla linkkiä opintoihisi (esim. harjoittelun tai opin-näytetyön, tai muiden projektien kautta)?
- Nykyinen ammatti, titteli ja työpaikka
- Kerro vapaasti työhistoriastasi valmistumisen jälkeen.

Opinnäytetyö
- Mikä oli opinnäytetyösi aihe?
- Mistä sait idean aiheeseen?
- Kauanko projekti kesti kokonaisuudessaan?
- Kerro vapaasti aiheesta, itse projektista ja mistä idea lähti.

Monialaisuus opinnoissa tai opinnäytetyössä
- Teitkö jonkinlaista yhteistyötä opinnäytetyöprojektissasi (monialaista; yhdessä muiden oppilaiden kanssa tms.)?
- Jos teit, miten yhteistyö toteutui käytännössä (työnjako, kirjoittaminen yms.) ja mi-ten koit sen toimivan?
- Miten monialaisuus näkyi ja oli mukana opinnoissasi kaiken kaikkiaan?
- Otitko kursseja muista koulutusohjelmista?

Hyödyt ja huonot puolet
- Kerro vapaasti mikä oli kokemuksesi monialaisista opinnoista/opinnäytetyöstä?
- Kokemuksiesi perusteella; suosittelisitko tätä työskentelytapaa muille opiskelijoille?
- Miten monialaisuus on näkynyt työelämässä valmistumisen jälkeen?
- Haaga-Helia on kehittämässä monialaisia opiskelumahdollisuuksia ja haluaa roh-kaista opiskelijoita opiskelemaan entistä monialaisemmin. Mitä ajattelet tästä?
- Muita ajatuksia, kommentteja, palautetta aiheesta? Kerro vapaasti.

    Haastattelun päättäminen ja haastateltavan informointi projektin jatkosta.

Yhteistyötä yli koulutusohjelmarajojen
Anni Sihvola

"Tuntuu, että kaikkea oppimaansa on voinut soveltaa työelämässä".

Kuva: Annika Mäki

Anni opiskeli johdon assistenttityön ja kielten koulutusohjelmassa pääaineenaan Johtaminen ja HR. Ennestään merkonomin paperit omaava Anni aloitti opintonsa keväällä 2014 ja valmistui jouluna 2015. Opintojen ohella hän työskenteli assistenttina teknologiayrityksessä ja jatkoi valmistuttuaan yrittäjäksi saman alan yritykseen.

Opinnäytetyön koittaessa Annista tuntui luontevalta lähteä etsimään aihetta omalta työnantajalta. Hän halusi päästä oppimaan uutta sekä tekemään jotain konkreettista ja hyödyllistä. Samassa yrityksessä sattui työskentelemään myös opintojaan Haaga-Heliassa viimeistelevä tietojenkäsittelyn opiskelija. Työkaverukset saivat idean yhteisestä toimeksiannosta ja tuloksena syntyi onnistunut monialaisen yhteistyön projekti, jossa yhdistyivät kahden eri koulutusohjelman opiskelijan taidot.

Toimeksiantaja oli yritys, joka tarjoaa asiakkailleen etäpalveluautomaatteja. Ne perustuvat teknologiaan, jonka avulla asiakkaita voi palvella etäältä reaaliaikaisen kuva- ja ääniyhteyden avulla. Projektina oli vanhan, vaikeaselkoisen käyttöliittymän korvaaminen ja uudistaminen asiakaspalvelijoiden työn helpottamiseksi.

Yhdessä työskennellessään opiskelijat oppivat toisiltaan uutta ja pääsivät käyttämään työssä omia vahvuuksiaan. Annin kumppani vastasi pääosin teknisestä puolesta ja itse käyttöliittymän toteutuksesta. Annilla taas oli ihmisläheisempi ote aiheeseen; hän hoiti esimerkiksi kontaktit yhdyshenkilöihin sekä haastattelut, joilla kerättiin käyttäjäkokemuksia ja palautetta käyttöliittymän parannteluun. Projektin aikana Anni oppi uutta käyttöliittymien teknisestä puolesta sekä eri ohjelmien käyttöä. Opiskelijat täydensivätkin taidoiltaan hyvin toisiaan.

Annin koki monialaisen yhteistyöprojektin olleen hyvä valinta. Se oli työelämälähtöinen ja opetti uutta käytännön osaamista hänen omassakin työssään. Projektin valmistuttua mieltä lämmitti erityisesti positiivinen palaute yritykseltä ja tieto siitä, että heillä oli työlle oikeasti käyttöä. Anni iloitsi mahdollisuudesta yhdistää opintonsa suoraan työhön: "Tuntuu, että kaikkea oppimaansa on voinut soveltaa työelämässä".

Oma monialainen osaaminen menestyksen avaimena
Anna Nurkse

"Kahden eri alan yhdistäminen on myös nykypäivän työelämässä tärkeää."

Kuva: Uzi Varon

Anna on monipuolisella opiskelu- ja työskentelytaustalla varustettu entinen ja nykyinen Haaga-Helialainen. Ylioppilastutkinnon jälkeen hän on hankkinut muun muassa datanomin ja tradenomin paperit, johtamisen erikoisammattitutkinnon sekä opiskelee paraikaa viidettä tutkintoaan Haaga-Helian ylemmässä amk:ssa, tietojärjestelmäosaamisen koulutusohjelmassa.

Vuonna 1995 HSO-sihteeriksi valmistuttuaan Anna siirtyi työelämään ja on työskennellyt siitä lähtien urallaan edeten, pääosin IT-alalla. Muutama vuosi sitten Anna huomasi, että vanhan HSO-sihteeritutkinnon voisi päivittää tradenomitutkinnoksi Haaga-Heliassa ja aloitti vuonna 2014 täydennysopinnot Johdon assistenttityön ja kielten koulutusohjelmassa. Tämä oli hänen kipeästi kaipaamansa väylä päästä jatkamaan IT-opintoja YAMK:n parissa.

Opinnäytetyössä Anna pääsi yhdistämään henkilökohtaista monialaista osaamistaan ja mielenkiinnon kohteitaan onnistuneesti. Hän työskenteli tuolloin 30 hengen yksikön johtajana firmassa, joka tekee muun muassa intranetteja. Anna sai inspiraation työlle Haaga-Helian strategiakurssilta ja halusi selvittää, miten strategian ja sen käytännön toteuttamisen voisi yhdistää sosiaaliseen intranetiin.

Opinnäytetyön aiheena olikin tutkia sosiaalista intranetiä strategiaviestinnän tukena. Työ oli poikkitieteellinen ja siinä yhdistyi liikkeenjohtoa sekä strategian vientiä käytäntöön. Lisäksi siihen liittyi tietojärjestelmäosaamista sosiaalisen intranetin osalta. Työ oli sekä kysely- että haastattelututkimus johdon assistentin näkökulmasta, mutta siinä yhdistyi vahvasti myös Annan muu koulutustausta ja osaaminen. "Kahden eri alan yhdistäminen on myös nykypäivän työelämässä tärkeää."

Poikkitieteellisyys työssä oli Annan mielestä positiivinen asia. Haasteellista oli aluksi aiheen rajaaminen, sitä kun pystyi tarkastelemaan usealta eri kantilta. Fokuksen löydyttyä tuloksena syntyi kuitenkin onnistunut moniulotteinen työ, josta oli konkreettista hyötyä kohderyhmälle. Työssä useampi hänen mielenkiinnonkohteistaan yhdistyivät. "Oli todella antoisaa, tuntui että opin itse omasta työstä ihan älyttömästi lisää ja siitä sai itse todella paljon".

Monialaisten opintojen siivittämänä kohti tulevaa
Arvo Perälä

"Monialaisuudella sain vähän omanlaista osaamiskokonaisuutta, jolla haen erilaista kilpailukykyä työmarkkinoilla".

Kuva: Anna Perälä

Arvo opiskeli liiketalouden koulutusohjelmassa suuntautuen laskentatoimeen. Opintonsa hän aloitti tammikuussa 2014 ja valmistui vuoden 2016 lopussa. Ennen tradenomiopintoja Arvolla oli taustallaan ylioppilastutkinnon lisäksi kandia vastaava määrä teologisia opintoja. Haaga-Heliassa hän otti opiskelumahdollisuuksista kaiken irti ja onkin hyvä esimerkki monialaisesti osaamistaan kehittäneestä opiskelijasta.

Opintojensa aikana Arvo suoritti koko joukon itseään kiinnostavia kursseja myös muiden koulutusohjelmien tarjonnasta. Kursseja yhdistelemällä hän koki saavansa laajemman kuvan käsitellyistä aihepiireistä, sillä kurssien lähestymistapa aiheeseen vaihteli koulutusohjelmasta riippuen.

Arvo syvensi erityisesti IT-osaamistaan käymällä tietohallinnon kursseja sekä tietojenkäsittelyn että finanssialan puolelta. Omien suuntautumisopintojensa ohella hän luki ylimääräiset syventävät opinnot myös liiketalouden esimiestyöstä sekä rahoituksesta. Taustalla hänellä oli selkeä syy: "Monialaisuudella sain omanlaista osaamiskokonaisuutta, jolla haen erilaista kilpailukykyä työmarkkinoilla".

Opinnäytetyölle Arvolla oli mielessä monta aihetta. Toimeksianto löytyi lopulta jo entuudestaan tutulta yhdistykseltä, Suomen vapaakirkon nuoret Ry:ltä. Hän oli mukana yhdistyksen toiminnassa ja oli havainnut tarpeen toiminnan fokusoimiselle ja terävöittämiselle. Tämän sekä erään Haaga-Helian strategiakurssin inspiroimana syntyi idea strategian kehittämisestä ja jalkauttamisesta.

Arvo suunnitteli yhdistykselle tasapainotetun tuloskortin; mittariston, jolla strategian etenemistä voidaan seurata ja mitata eri näkökulmista: talouden, asiakkaan, sisäisten prosessien sekä oppimisen kautta. Kuten arvata saattaa, opinnäytetyökin oli monialainen yhdistäen laskentaa, johtamista ja tietohallintoa. Sekä toimeksiantaja että Arvo olivat tyytyväisiä projektin tulokseen: "Monta asiaa meni näköjään tässä oikein".

Monialainen osaaminen valttikorttina työelämässä
Sini Kervinen

"Haluan juurruttaa saamani opi käytäntöön. Siksi on ollut tärkeää, että olen aina tehnyt töitä samaan aikaan."

Kuva: Aller Media

Sinin polku Haaga-Heliassa alkoi vuonna 2004, kun hän aloitti opiskelun tietojenkäsittelyn koulutusohjelmassa. Tämän jälkeen hän on suorittanut Haaga-Heliassa myös tuloksellisen esimiestyön erikoistumisopinnot vuonna 2011 sekä aloitti ylemmän AMK-tutkinnon tietojärjestelmäosaamisesta vuonna 2017.

Sinillä työ ja opiskelut ovat kulkeneet aina käsi kädessä ja hän on laajentanut osaamistaan menestyksekkään uran rakentamisen ohella. Hän on inspiroiva esimerkki monialaisuuden toteutumisesta ja sen hedelmien korjaamisesta käytännössä. "Haluan juurruttaa saamani opit käytäntöön. Siksi on ollut tärkeää, että olen aina tehnyt töitä samaan aikaan."

Monialaisuus korostui jo tradenomiopinnoissa, joissa Sini yhdisti tietojenkäsittelyyn vakuutusalan erikoistumisopinnot sekä myyntiä ja yrittäjyyttä. Opinnäytteyökin oli varsin monialainen; siinä yhdistyi myynti ja tietohallinto, ja Sini teki työn silloiselle työnantajalleen yhteistyössä toisen opiskelijan kanssa. Aiheena oli tutkia, mikä on paras mainosten ja mediaympäristön kombinaatio. Sini keskittyi itse kyselyn tekemiseen ja tuloksen analysointiin ja hänen parinsa taas enemmän markkinanäkökulmaan. Työ oli onnistunut, ja kumpikin pääsi käyttämään omia vahvuuksiaan.

Haaga-Helian opintojen jälkeen Sini on ansioitunut monella eri osa-alueella. Hän on muun muassa kouluttanut ohjelmointia, luonut ja pyörittänyt omia pienyrityksiä sekä hankkinut hyvinvointi- ja elämäntaitovalmentajan pätevyydet. Hän toimii myös digitaalisen mainonnan ja markkinoinnin alaa edistävän IAB:n hallituksen puheenjohtajana Suomessa, mikä on iso meriitti hänen alallaan.

Nykyään Sini on data- ja digitaalisen markkinoinnin ammattilainen. Valmistuttuaan hän työskenteli Sanomalla ja useissa koulutustaan vastaavissa tehtävissä. Sieltä hän jatkoi nykyiseen työpaikkaansa Aller Medialle. Sini aloitti työskentelyn online-mainonnan kehitysprojektien parissa, mutta parissa vuodessa hän on edennyt oman alansa asiantuntijaksi, aina esimiestehtäviin saakka.

Haaga-Heliasta saatavaa koulutuspohjaa Sini kehuu mahdollisuuksia antavana: "Opinnot antavat erinomaiset lähtökohdat ja valmiudet erikoistua edelleen oman kiinnostuksen ja innostuksen johdattamina".