

From Dyslexia to Doctorate: My Personal Journey

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From Dyslexia to Doctorate:

My Personal Journey

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this narrative to my parents and my brother. Without their love and support, none of this would have been possible. I would not be where I am today if it was not for them. I love them from the bottom of my heart.

I would also like to thank my teachers and coaches at Saint Stephen's Episcopal School in Bradenton, Florida as well as my professors, supervisors, and colleagues at Stetson University, Southern Methodist University, Johns Hopkins University, and University of South Florida for all of their support.

Section 1

Dyslexia

A group of students

All present in class

We read the same book

The purpose, the outcomes so easy to see

But... not for me

Imagine you and I are reading a chapter in a book. When we finish, we discuss what we learned. You discussed who the main characters were as well as what the outcome of the chapter was. I discussed ... Yes, that is correct. I could not discuss anything, because I did not remember anything from the chapter. This is an occurrence that my parents and I started to notice when I was in intermediate school, which was 4th-6th grade at Saint Stephen's Episcopal School, a college preparatory school in Bradenton, Florida that I had attended since 1st grade. My family and I scheduled an appointment with a psychologist, where they conducted tests to analyze my learning process and ability. When the psychologist completed their tests, a conclusion had been made. They met with my parents and told them I had dyslexia. According to the Mayo Clinic, "Dyslexia is a learning disorder that involves difficulty reading due to problems identifying speech sounds and learning how they relate to letters and words (decoding). Also called reading disability, dyslexia affects areas of the brain that process language" (2017, para. 1). Furthermore, the Learning Disability Association of America explains how dyslexia is "A specific learning

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disability that affects reading and related language-based processing skills” (n.d., para 10). My journey to overcoming dyslexia had officially started.

Grades 4-6: Intermediate School

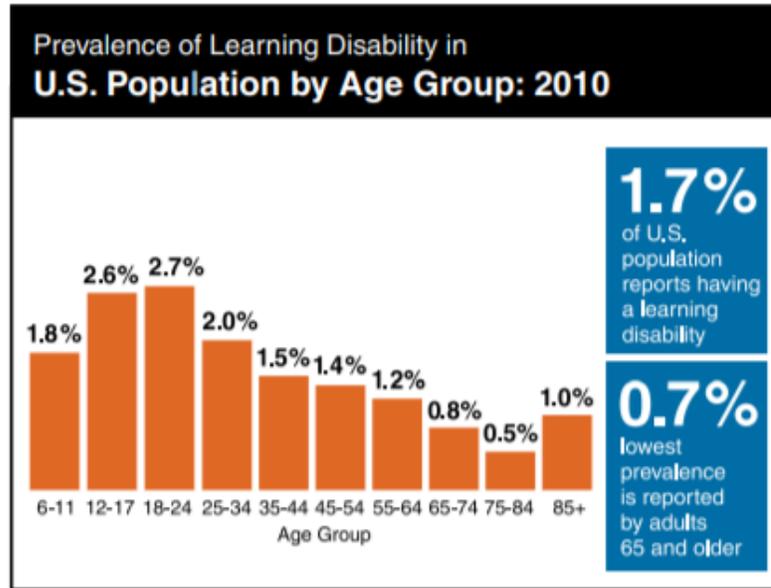
I walked into class

Everything felt the same to me

But one thing was clear

Dyslexia was present, officially

At the time of being diagnosed with dyslexia, I was in 4th grade. While I did not understand what dyslexia meant then, it was something to which I would have to adapt. The Colorado Department of Education explains, “Dyslexia affects about 15 to 20 percent of the population, making it the most commonly diagnosed learning disability” (n.d., para 1). Moreover, according to The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity, dyslexia affects 20% of people and equates to 80-90% of diagnoses of people who have a learning disability; in addition, they discuss how dyslexia is the most common among neuro-cognitive disorders (2017). The graph below displays an age distribution in the United States of individuals who report this learning disability:



Source: H. Stephen Kaye, Unpublished tabulations of 2010 data from the U.S. Census Bureau Survey of Income and Program Participation

(Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014, p. 26)

As the graph shows, learning disabilities are present in individuals of all ages. While this graph shows the distribution of individuals in each age range who have admitted to having a learning disability, this graph may not represent everybody in this category. For example, I am currently in the 25-34 age range where 2.0% have admitted to being diagnosed with a learning disability. What if 2.0% shown is actually 7.0%? Or 10.0%? Or 23%? Or 44%? The answer to this is--- we do not know and we may never know, depending on if every individual with a learning disability actually admits they have one. These types of data are too questionable to know for sure if the percentages are accurate.

After the diagnosis, my parents informed my teachers of my disability. As a result, my testing mechanism shifted. For example, “The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that students with learning disabilities in kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) have access to a host of accommodations and services such as special classes, individual

instruction, and alternative testing” (Hadley, Morrison, & Hemphill, 2006, para, 4). When I took tests, I was granted 50% extra time. If my teacher gave our class an hour, I would get an hour and a half. While I was only in fourth grade when this began, I soon found that when I entered middle school and high school how helpful the extra time on tests was; it allowed me to not have to rush and to be able to take my time to respond to each question.

Interestingly, the assignments in my mathematics and English class (Writing) did not impact me. I have always enjoyed working with numbers and I did not have challenges with the process of calculations in my Mathematics class. Also, the assignments in my English class that involved writing, which I have always enjoyed, did not present challenges to me either. However, I noticed a different outlook in my History and Science, and English classes (Reading). The reading assignments in these classes presented challenges; while I completed them, the process of information was difficult as I had trouble retaining the content from the textbooks, books, and articles. According to the Colorado Department of Education, “Brain imaging studies have shown brain differences between people with and without dyslexia. These differences occur in areas of the brain involved with key reading skills. For individuals with dyslexia, areas of the brain involving reading may not function in the same ways they do in individuals without dyslexia” (n.d., para 2). Reading has presented it challenges to me, but I have learned how to overcome this obstacle. One method in which I started to use in class was note taking when I read in order to have points to refer back to. This is a process I found to be effective and it something that I even continue to this day.

Grades 7-8: Middle School

The frustration continued

But that did not stop me

The support I had

Allowed me to see

The type of student I could be

As I started middle school, which was 7th and 8th grade at Saint Stephen's Episcopal School, I had to balance my classes along with sports throughout the school year in which I played football in the fall and soccer during the winter). The classes, which I processed information the best, were Mathematics, English (Writing) as well as two languages studied: Latin and Spanish. If you asked me, which class I miss the most from Saint Stephen's, it is Latin. The classes, which presented me the most challenges were History, Science, and English (Reading). The trend is similar to the one I had in intermediate school. With the difficulty I experienced in these classes, my teachers provided additional, individualized support to help me. For example, there were times where I would have to read sections of books for class multiple times in order to comprehend the information, and meet with teachers for additional discussion of material from class.

Grades 9-12: High School

The workload grew

But one thing I knew

High school was ending

And college of was upon me

While I had still had frustration

I also had motivation

To strive to be

The best version of me

Throughout my high school career, which was 9th-12th grade at Saint Stephen's Episcopal School, the balancing act between my classes, and football in the fall, soccer in the winter as well as track and field in the spring continued. In addition, the academic trend continued where I processed information from my Mathematics and English (Writing), Latin, and Spanish classes the best, while my History, Science, and English (Reading) classes presented me the most challenges. I also continued the meetings with teachers in addition to class time. This allowed me to have one-on-one meetings where I could discuss the information with them. The importance of these meetings was the opportunity to have individualized support from my teachers to help me comprehend class materials as well as help prepare me for upcoming tests, quizzes, and assignments. This is a testament to the determination, my teachers had to help support me through high school, resulting in effective learning strategies to implement as I graduated and transitioned to college.

Section 2

Beginning of my Collegiate Journey

As high school ended

My collegiate journey soon began

Although there would be a lot of work

I would be prepared

My collegiate journey started in August 2014 at Stetson University in DeLand, Florida. With a regular schedule of three to four classes per semester, the workload was significant. However, I did not let dyslexia interrupt my journey. There was a lot of reading for each class, but I adapted, even if that meant reading at a slower pace or reading chapters multiple times to comprehend the information. Along with difficulties of acquisition and utilization of the written language, the International Dyslexia Association also explains how the following are challenges for individuals diagnosed with dyslexia:

- “Learning to speak
- Learning letters and their sounds
- Organizing written and spoken language
- Memorizing number facts
- Reading quickly enough to comprehend
- Persisting with and comprehending longer reading assignments
- Spelling
- Learning a foreign language

- “Correctly doing math operations” (International Dyslexia Association, 2020, para. 11)

Since my official diagnosis of dyslexia in 4th grade, my main challenges have revolved around reading comprehension. Of the list above from the International Dyslexia Association, the two challenges, which have impacted me the most are “Reading quickly enough to comprehend” and “Persisting with and comprehending longer reading assignments” (Ibid).

Somebody not as familiar with dyslexia might ask themselves, how common is dyslexia or other learning disabilities are within the college student population? “According to the latest data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics, of undergraduate students self-reporting a disability, 11% reported having a learning disability. Enrollment statistics also listed by the NCES found that 20.4 million students were expected to attend an American college or university in the fall of 2017, meaning more than 200,000 students entering college have some type of learning disability” (Best Colleges, 2020, para. 3; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021; Digest of Educational Statistics, 2019). When I was a student at Stetson, I always told people, if you are looking for me on a Friday night, I will be in the library. While I took more time to complete reading assignments for classes, the additional study time helped me accomplish them.

While I received my Bachelor’s degree in Management from Stetson, I took classes from different academic disciplines. I remember my first class I took at Stetson, which was a first-year seminar entitled: Global Citizenship – Individual, Community, World. Over the course of my first semester at Stetson, this course helped me learn about the importance of being a well-rounded citizen in one’s community, whether it is at school or one’s hometown. At the conclusion of this course, I began to seek out opportunities where I could make a positive impact

on others, a direct result from material learned in this course. And, also support my teachers in elementary, intermediate, middle, and high school afforded me. At Stetson, I shifted from being the supported to the supporter. I worked as a writing tutor and writing fellow in the Writing Center, and peer Success coach in the Academic Success Center, where I supported students from different backgrounds, including student-athletes, international students, and English as a Second Language (ESOL) students.

I also presented my research paper while I was a student at Stetson: “Analyzing the role of authority between tutors and international students during a writing center session” at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring and Writing (NCPTW) in November 2016 in Tacoma, Washington hosted by the University of Puget Sound. As I mentioned before, I had teachers who took their time to meet with me to provide individualized support in order to help me comprehend information from my classes. While reading provided me challenges throughout intermediate school, middle school, high school, and college, writing is an aspect of my life in which I have always enjoyed. For this research paper, I focused on my experience as a writing tutor working with international students in the writing center at Stetson. I helped international students who struggled with writing obstacles, and language barriers. In this position, I went from being the supported, with my teachers meeting with me in a one-on-one setting to help me comprehend information from class, to the supporter as a writing tutor.

Turning Point #1

With graduation right around the corner

The end of my time at Stetson was near

I thought to myself

Wow, time flew, oh dear

So many ideas moving forward

I felt like glue

At last, something sparked

I now knew what to do

Fast forward to August 2017; the start of my senior year at Stetson University. I was still involved in extracurricular activities. Graduation was right around the corner, but I did not know what my next step was. I did not know if I was going to go to graduate school for my Master's in Business Administration, law school for my Juris Doctor, or to get a job. I watched a video on YouTube by Tony Robbins, a famous motivational speaker known worldwide, and he asks the audience to think about two moments in their lives where if the outcome had been different, their lives would have been different as well (Advice for Life, 2020). I remember watching the College Football Playoff Selection Show on ESPN on Sunday, December 3rd. Growing up an Ohio State Buckeyes fan, my hope was Ohio State would be selected for the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California or the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans, Louisiana, both of which were semifinals and set for New Year's Day. My ultimate hope was for Ohio State to play at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia on January 8, 2018 for a chance to win the national championship. However, as the show announced the four teams selected for these bowl games, Ohio State was not one of them.

While my excitement was not as high then due to Ohio State not making the one of the semifinal bowl games and not having a chance to become national champions, they were still guaranteed a bowl game to finish their season. As I continued to watch the selection show, I saw

Ohio State's bowl game destination: The Cotton Bowl in Dallas, Texas, which would take place on December 29. For as long as I can remember, I had always wanted to visit Dallas. Even at my high school senior night for football, every senior was asked to write down their dream job, and mine was to become the General Manager of the Dallas Cowboys football team in the National Football League (NFL). Soon after the announcement was made about Ohio State going to the Cotton Bowl, I searched online for ticket prices just for curiosity. Then, I received an email from my parents with tickets attached for the Cotton Bowl. Next stop: Dallas, Texas!

When my parents and I arrived in Dallas, we had a few days to explore the area before the Cotton Bowl. We stayed in a hotel near Cowboys Stadium in the city of Arlington where the game would to be played. On our second day there, we visited the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum in the city of University Park. We made the 30-mile drive west to it. As we arrived, we noticed it was located on the campus of Southern Methodist University (SMU). After completing our tour of the Presidential Library and Museum, we decided to take a tour of SMU as well. From the moment I saw the campus, I knew SMU was a special place; I knew it was the place for me.

After the Cotton Bowl ended (Ohio State won against the University of Southern California 24-7), we returned home, and I started to search the graduate programs at SMU. As I explored the Simmons School of Education and Human Development, I noticed they offered a Master's degree in Higher Education. I immediately thought of the positive experiences I had at Stetson and realized how pursuing a Master's degree in Higher Education would be the perfect fit for me to learn about how colleges and universities function and operate as well as learn about different aspects of higher education, including Admissions, Student Affairs, and Finance. I quickly emailed the Program Director and had a 45-minute phone conversation with her the

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following week (Mid-January 2018) to learn more about the program. Right after the phone conversation, I called my parents and told them I was going to apply and attend SMU for the program if I was accepted. I applied to the program within days after my phone conversation with the Program Director. After then, I continued on with my last semester at Stetson, with graduation only about four months away. Two weeks later, near the end of January, I remember sitting on the bottom floor of the Lynn Business Center (LBC) on Stetson's campus and I opened my laptop to check my email. I saw an email from SMU, and this is the moment where I received my official acceptance letter to the program via email. Dallas, Texas was a place I had always wanted to visit, and now it was about to be the place I move to for graduate school.

Section 3

Graduate School- New Beginning

The beaches, the water

No longer the case

As I looked forward

I saw a whole new place

Nervous for sure

But also excited

For this great opportunity

I was very delighted

July 2018. I had officially moved to Dallas, Texas to begin my new journey as a graduate student in the Master's in Higher Education program in the Simmons School of Education and Human Development at Southern Methodist University. As a Florida native, I grew up in the city of Bradenton. With a population of around 60,000-70,000 and located right on the Gulf of Mexico with a bright sun and clear blue skies, it was (and still is) paradise every day. I attended Saint Stephen's Episcopal School, a college preparatory school, with an enrollment of around 700 students. Also, as a student at Stetson University, I was a part of a small tight-knit community there. Located in DeLand, Florida with a population of around 30,000, Stetson felt like "a home away from home". In 2017, DeLand was announced as the winner of having the

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best Main Street in the United States (Vasquez, 2017). This small, quaint town was a hidden gem in the eyes of many, including mine, and when you become a part of it, it is hard to leave.

Now, imagine growing up in Bradenton and going to college in DeLand, but then the environment changes. As I arrived in Dallas, the atmosphere was completely different than what I was used to. Huge buildings, tremendous amount of traffic on the highways (even busier than the ones in Florida), and a lot of people. At the time of moving to Dallas, there were around 2 million people living in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex and the number of people moving there continues to increase. Was I nervous? Absolutely. Was I excited? Absolutely. I was ready to embrace a new challenge, a new opportunity.

Graduate School- Year #1

August was here

The program just started

A lot of work to come

But I was here to stay

And do my best every day

It seemed like just yesterday. I walked into the Harold Simmons Hall for my orientation and the beginning of Master's in Higher Education program at SMU had officially begun. My first semester consisted of three courses in addition to being a graduate assistant in the SMU Global and Online department, now known as the Continuing and Professional Department and helping out in the Player Personnel Department of the football program. After the first week of school, I noticed a significant increase in the amount of homework. I went from reading around

25-50 pages per week for each course as an undergraduate student at Stetson to now reading 100-200 pages for each course. To some, this may not seem too difficult; however, reading comprehension is an area of school in which had always presented challenges, but I have learned to cope with it. In this situation, I did just that. I gave myself enough time to complete the readings for my courses each week, and this sometimes meant reading the same book chapter or article multiple times in order to digest the information and understand it.

An important aspect of the homework assignments was to find a place where I could get my work done. On campus, I would go to Fondren Library. Similar to other universities, the higher the level a student goes, the quieter it is to study. While the library had four floors, I usually found myself studying on the third floor, not too noisy, but not super quiet either. I would also go to a Starbucks Coffee shop located right next to campus near the Gerald J. Ford football stadium. When I was not on campus, I would study at my apartment, which was conveniently located less than two miles from campus in the Knox/Henderson District near Highland Park and not too far away from downtown Dallas. Although at first, I was not a fan of studying in my apartment, because it was too distracting with the TV and kitchen, I learned how to overcome those and utilize it as a study space. I had to learn how to balance my graduate assistant position with 20 hours per week, assisting the football program with 10-20 hours per week, and my three courses with 9 hours per week. In essence, I had a full-time job through these experiences a trend, which continued through my time as a graduate student at SMU.

Turning Point #2

I looked ahead

And saw a chance

Was I nervous?

Yes, but I knew my stance

I took the gamble

Luckily, for me

It paid off

At last, I had a new opportunity

I remember sitting my one of my courses, “The College Student”, which focused on learning about the role of a student on a college campus and how they are an integral part to a college’s success. We were split into two groups and I was placed into the group of six to research the impact of faculty engagement at institutions. Our next step was to select three institutions out of a list of eighteen. As we rotated around the selection board, my first pick was the University of Texas at Austin (Austin, Texas), my second pick was University of Notre Dame (South Bend, Indiana), and my third and final pick was Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, Maryland). I cannot tell you what it was, but there was something about Johns Hopkins University, which stood out to me more than the University of Texas at Austin and University of Notre Dame, or the other fifteen institutions on the list for this group project. The goal of our research project was to learn about the levels of faculty engagement of all eighteen institutions. Also, the project required us to interview an employee of the institutions who could provide assistance to discuss faculty engagement. As I first began to research Johns Hopkins University, I was not sure which department to contact in regard to faculty engagement. I ended

up deciding to send an email to the Special Advisor to the Dean of Students on October 1, 2018 in which it read:

“My name is Jeremy Jackman. I am a graduate student at Southern Methodist University in the Masters of Higher Education program. I am doing a project on faculty engagement on different universities across the country. I was wondering if Johns Hopkins University has any programs implemented that they do for faculty engagement. Are there any faculty or staff that you would recommend me contact to talk about this subject more? Thank you very much and I look forward to hearing from you soon” (J. Jackman, personal communication, October 1, 2018).

As I expected to hear back from the Special Advisor to the Dean of Students, she instead passed my information along to the Dean of Academic and Student Services, whom I received an email from the following day. I was able to set up a 45-minute phone conversation with him just over a month later on November 5, 2018 where he discussed the programs Johns Hopkins University has in place to create high levels of faculty engagement on campus.

The group project was a success, but there was something about Johns Hopkins University to which I sensed a connection. As I went back and forth in my mind, I ended up sending an email to ask the Dean of Academic and Student Services about summer internship opportunities. I was nervous to send the email, because part of me wanted to try and get a summer internship at Johns Hopkins University, and part of me did not. I believe a reason for the hesitation towards the email was the ability to change. For example, I became comfortable at SMU and the Dallas community where I could stay during the summer for an internship or I could return home to Bradenton, Florida and try to get an internship at an institution in the

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Tampa Bay area. The thought of possibly having the opportunity to go to Baltimore for the summer of 2019 was exciting, yet nerve wrecking at the same time. However, I decided to take a chance and overcome my fear of trying something new and it worked. I had officially been offered a six-week internship at Johns Hopkins University's Center for Student Success.

Summer Internship

The pristine water

Of the Inner Harbor

Down Charles Street I went

Six weeks in total

Where my time would be spent

As I walked up the hill

The campus shined bright

My chance, now in sight

Baltimore, I am here

My internship had officially started

Let us cheer

On July 10, 2018, I started my summer internship at Johns Hopkins University on the Homewood campus in Baltimore, Maryland. I was given the role of Graduate Summer

Coordinator for the Center for Student Success, where 30 hours per week would be dedicated to assisting the Hop-In program, an orientation program for first-generation and/or limited-income students, and 10 hours per week would be dedicated to the Academic Services and Analysis department. In this role, my responsibilities were:

- Serving as an instructor for the Intro to Hopkins: Arrive and Thrive course (23 students)
- Analyzing and collecting data on the academic performance of students in the last four cohorts of the Hop-In program (140 students in total) and in the last two cohorts of the Johns Hopkins Underrepresented in Medical Professions program (70 students in total)
- Working with the Director of Academic Services Assessment and Analysis to analyze 1,500 undergraduate student survey results about their college experience

One aspect, which stood out to me the most during my internship was the trust Johns Hopkins University had in me. When they chose me to teach one of the two sections of the Intro to Hopkins: Arrive & Thrive course, I got goosebumps from both excitement and nervousness, but I am so happy they chose me. A little background information on the Hop-In orientation program: Johns Hopkins University selected 46 incoming first-year students who were first-generation and/or limited-income in which they would take this course, along with a course for credit during the summer before the academic school year officially began. This course allowed me the opportunity to help these students with the academic transition from high school to Johns Hopkins University, an experience I still remember and grateful for to this day.

Graduate School- Year #2

Back in Dallas

Another round we go

Excited to be here

One year left

The future was near

The next step after graduation

Not so clear

But nevertheless

I was positive I would make the right move

Just like in a game of chess

The fall semester started and I was two semesters away from graduating with my Master's in Higher Education degree from SMU. The coursework was similar to my first year at SMU where I continued with three classes each semester with about a 100-200 pages of reading per week, while maintaining my position as a graduate student assistant with the football program; in addition, I started a new graduate assistant position in the Office of Research and Graduate Studies, now known as the Moody School for Graduate and Advanced Studies. One of the courses I took during fall 2019 was a field studies within the virtual reality lab in the School

of Education and Human Development at SMU. This course allowed me to learn about how virtual reality can help current and future individuals within the education field.

Another component I worked on throughout the fall semester was applications for doctoral programs. The idea of applying to doctoral programs made me nervous. I was not sure if it was the path I wanted to go. However, after consulting with some of my professors at SMU along with my positive experiences I had during my summer internship at Johns Hopkins University, I knew the path towards a doctoral program was the path for me. By December 2019, I had completed all of my applications for the doctoral programs and now it was time to wait to hear from the schools to receive either an acceptance or rejection letter.

As the spring semester began (my last semester at SMU), everything remained the same. I continued with three courses and my graduate assistantship in the Office of Research and Graduate Studies as well as helping out with the football program. However, as spring break was approaching, the tension around the campus changed. There had been a lot of news about the recent global pandemic, also known as COVID-19, and how it was spreading across the world. I remember like it was just yesterday. I had one last class before flying home to Florida for spring break. On Thursday, March 12, 2020, I took the midterm exam for my Higher Education in Finance course. This ended up being the last time I had an in-person class on campus at SMU. I returned home the next day, and the following week, I received an email from SMU to let students and their families know about the current status of COVID-19 and how the university would be adjusting to a virtual format for the remainder of the spring semester, which had about six weeks of classes, remaining and eight weeks until the graduation ceremony. This was the beginning of virtual learning becoming the new norm in the education field.

Section 4

The Beginning of My Doctoral Journey

The Sunshine State

Appeared so bright

As I made the drive back from Dallas

I saw the next opportunity in sight

Back home in Florida

Where it all started

USF, here I come

In the city where I was from

As my last semester at SMU was ending, the next step was still uncertain. I still had not heard back from all of the schools to which I applied for doctoral programs. At this point, I had heard back from the majority of schools, though all of them were rejection letters. There were a lot of thoughts going through my mind. What happens if I do not get into a doctoral program? Will I stay here in Dallas? Will I move back to Florida? Will I move somewhere else? It was a stressful time for me, because I knew my current path was ending and I was not sure what my next path would be. All of a sudden, I saw a sign; a sign of an opportunity. On Thursday, April 30, 2020, with graduation from my Master's in Higher Education degree only two weeks away, I received an email from the program director and administrative assistant of the Ph.D. in

Educational Leadership program in the College of Education at University of South Florida (USF), in which the first part of it read:

“Good Morning,

Congratulations on your acceptance to the USF Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program. All of us in ELPS are very pleased that you have been accepted into USF and we look forward to working with you on your doctoral journey” (USF, personal communication, April 30, 2020).

Every type of emotion ran through me. Excited. Nervous. Relieved. Happy. Stressed. As I was about to graduate from the Master’s in Higher Education program at SMU, I finally saw the light at the end of the tunnel. A new opportunity presented itself and I had a decision to make to either accept or reject it. For me, it was an easy decision: Accepted. University of South Florida, Ph.D. in Educational Leadership program, Fall 2020, Cohort. My doctoral journey was about to begin back in my home state.

Graduate School- Year #3

Home again

To start a new journey

Completely online

I knew I would be fine

In-person, not now

COVID-19 was here

Virtual classes instead

Completely new to me

How will it go?

We shall see

On August 15, 2020, I had my virtual orientation for the Ph.D. in Educational Leadership program at USF. Students had the opportunity to introduce themselves to fellow cohort members and the program faculty. I explained to everyone how I own Gulf Coast Institute for Success, an educational consulting company based out of Bradenton, Florida (my hometown). The name of the business comes from the location of Bradenton being located on the Gulf of Mexico. At first, I had expectations the business would excel right away, but then I started to think about the reasons why it was doing just okay: 1. The global pandemic continued to spread across the world and schools were impacted, leaving students to work remotely, 2. Companies were downsizing due to the impact of COVID-19, possibly leaving families without jobs, and 3. People were hesitant to meet in person as a result of the global pandemic and were uncertain of the idea of virtual educational consulting.

As the fall semester continued, I started to make more connections with families in the Bradenton/Sarasota area and began to get the first wave of people for business. This was for both college advising and academic coaching (study skills, time management and organization,

confidence building, etc.). The important thing here to remember is my business was slowly growing, but at the same, I also balanced two courses and I had to make sure I prioritized them as well. The amount of work had for each course, each week, each day was significant, and I had to allocate enough time to complete all of my assignments for school. Similar to the business, both courses were virtual through different softwares, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Blackboard Ultra Collaborate. I never thought I would have courses online, but this became the new normal in the era of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Once the fall semester ended, my assumption was my classes could potentially be back in-person, but it did not happen. As the spring semester started, my courses continued online; my fall and spring semesters were comprised of one five-week course in the first half and another five-week course in the second half. One of the surprises I encountered as I began the Ph.D. program at USF was the placement of the courses; my first year of courses consisted of only Saturday classes. Each level of education posed a different approach in terms of placement for courses. As an undergraduate student at Stetson University, the majority of my classes were during the day with the exception of a few held in the evenings. As a graduate student at SMU, my courses were held exclusively in the evenings in order to make sure they would not conflict with the time schedules of students who had full-time jobs or held graduate assistantships on campus. The shift to only having classes on Saturday during my first year at USF was surprising, but also an adjustment. It took time to adapt to working throughout the week with my business and then having class on the weekends. In addition, I had to make sure I completed all of my homework assignments throughout the week as well.

Also, even though the courses were only five-weeks long, it was essentially a fifteen-week (semester length) course condensed into five-weeks. In addition, although the courses were

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only during this time period, this was only for the course meetings: the course assignments would have due dates shortly after the last course meeting (ex. Within a week) and well beyond it as well (ex. One month). During the fall and spring semesters of my first year in the program, there were times where my courses overlapped with one another, creating a significant increase in the amount of work in a short period of time. There were times (and still are) where between my business, course meetings, course readings, and course assignments, it all feels like a balancing act. Over the course of my first year in the program, I became much more comfortable with the ideas of having class on the weekends, having class in a five-week time period, and having classes overlapping occasionally throughout the semester in terms of assignments. My first year in the program presented me a lot of challenges, including the ones above (and having my classes completely online). But at the same time, these tight schedules helped me continue to grow as a student and an individual in life. Also, the first year in the program taught me how to manage and organize my time in order to make sure I was successful with my classes, but also with my business as well.

Graduate School Year #4

The summer was here

School was not near

Oh wait, just kidding

June and July filled with classes

School work to do

At this time of year

To me, this was somewhat new

As I write this here

November is near

The work continues

A lot more to do

One step at a time

Through and through

As I write this, I am currently in my first semester of my second year of the Ph.D. in Educational Leadership program at USF. While USF and many other institutions around the worldwide have worked towards getting back to the dynamics of normalcy, all of my classes have stayed completely online this semester. However, there was one change in particular to this semester, which is an adjustment. For the first three semesters (Including this past summer) in my program, I took two classes each time. For the current semester, the beginning consisted of two classes, but in early October, I started a third class. As a result of this, there have been two primary challenges with which I have dealt. First, the addition of a third class has added a significant amount of schoolwork to be complete on a daily and weekly basis. Second, while I had to balance the amount of schoolwork with three classes, I also had to handle my business as well. This has not been easy, but I have been able to do it. I think this is testament to the academic obstacles I have been able to overcome since being diagnosed with dyslexia. I am just

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on my next step in my journey and I want everyone to know how important it is to not let anything get in the way of you achieving your goals.

My Next Step

The journey continues

And here I am

Obstacles might appear

But I have no fear

Keep moving forward

Up next... a whole new slate

Stay the course

Opportunities await

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Themes I Discovered in My Narrative about My Lived Experiences Overcoming Dyslexia

1. Self-Perseverance

- a. Studying in the library on Friday nights during college is something I chose to do and it paid off greatly as it helped me complete assignments for class.

2. Family Support

- a. My parents helped me identify dyslexia when I was young. Throughout my academic journey, my parents and brother have always been there for me and I will always be thankful for their love and support.

3. Teacher Support

- a. The support I received from my teachers at Saint Stephen's Episcopal School in Bradenton, Florida is something I truly appreciate, because they took their time to meet with me to discuss concepts from class and helped me develop a stronger understanding of them.

4. Adapting to Change

- a. Having lived in Florida my entire life, it was challenging to leave. When I moved 1,000 miles west to Dallas, Texas to attend SMU for graduate school, I was nervous, but stayed positive. In addition, after my first year of graduate school at SMU, I went to Baltimore, Maryland to intern at Johns Hopkins University.

5. Windows of Opportunity

- a. My parents taking me on a trip to Dallas, Texas is something I will always be grateful for as I visited SMU and I knew it was the place I wanted to be at for graduate school. In addition, having the opportunity to intern in the at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland was an amazing experience.

Author

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