

Personal Narrative

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Abstract

When I think of my academic and professional experiences, I tend to see myself on a rollercoaster. I am sitting in the seat, anxious but so excited for the attendant to press the button to start the ride. Except in this case, I am the attendant since I am the only one who can make the choice to go even if I am feeling anxious and excited. Throughout my academic experience I have had high points and low points. These experiences have shaped me into the person I am today. My professional experiences made me realize what I want and do not want for my future. This paper will be about my educational and professional journey and what I have learned through these experiences. It has been a wild ride, but so exciting to experience.

Academic Experience

My educational journey in higher education has been a rollercoaster. There have been many ups, downs, turns, and loops. Upon graduating from high school in June 2018, I enrolled in courses at Tidewater Community College (TCC) in Virginia Beach, Virginia. My classes began in August of 2018, so I needed to adjust quickly to college level courses. I was able to adjust quickly to being a full-time student while working a part time job. I finished each semester with straight As and was very proud of myself. In March 2019, everyone went home for spring break, and I never went back to in-person classes. The COVID-19 Pandemic had shut down in person classes which forced me to become an online student. I remember feeling nervous, anxious and so overwhelmed at the time since I would need to adjust again.

Once online classes started through Zoom, I enjoyed being in the comfort of my own home while attending classes. I was able to prioritize assignments, learn new time management skills, and learned that I had a bit more flexibility with my assignments. In 2020, I earned my associate's degree in social sciences from TCC. Initially, my plan was to get my counseling degree and become a school counselor in an elementary school. I chose social sciences to learn the foundational pieces behind psychology to help me later down the road. I decided to keep taking online courses so I could work a full-time job while attending classes full-time as well. Online classes have given me so much flexibility on when I do my assignments while still meeting deadlines.

After completing my associates degree, I transferred to Old Dominion University (ODU) in Norfolk, Virginia. I declared my major as psychology since I enjoyed my social sciences class so much at TCC. I was in my second to last semester of being in the psychology program when I could not pass a math class required for the psychology major. I tried everything I could from getting a tutor, taking practice assessments, and countless hours of studying. Overall, 2 years had gone by, and I was in the same place watching all my friends graduate around me. This was a very low point in my higher education journey. I took a gap semester and continued to work full time, but I knew I needed to continue going to school. I needed to change something to eventually graduate and get a higher paying job. I switched my degree to Leadership and immediately knew I was in the right place. I found my first leadership courses to be inspirational. As I continue through my last few courses, I still feel the same way and I enjoy learning more about leadership each day. Now, I am in my last semester, and I will graduate in May 2025.

Through my roller coaster of an experience, I was able to persevere through the obstacles that were thrown my way to earn my bachelor's degree. The process was not easy, but I was able to learn a lot about myself. This journey has taught me to not compare myself to those around me since all our final destinations are different. After graduation in May, I will be applying to master's programs to further my education. I will continue to use my educational background and all the lessons I have learned to keep pushing myself until I reach the outcome that I want, and I know I can obtain.

Professional Experience

I had always dreamed of being a school counselor since I was in an elementary school. I knew I wanted to help people feel better and make a difference in children's lives. When I turned 16, I started working my first job as an after-school counselor at a daycare. I mostly worked with first and second graders at this time. I worked in this position for the remainder of high school as well as my first year of college. When school was not in session I worked for the summer camp program. I loved working with children and being that person, they could look up to at the time. In March 2019, the pandemic shut down most childcare centers and my department was shut down permanently. During the pandemic, I started nannying for a family I met from the summer camp program until they went back to school in person.

In the fall of 2020, I was offered a position as a special education teacher assistant for Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS). I accepted the position since I knew it would help me gain valuable experience for my future career as a school counselor. I started working as a 1:1 for a first grader with mild behavior problems who was also recently diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. As a 1:1 I went with him everywhere all day long. I moved up with him each year until he moved in the middle of his fourth-grade year. Instead of being a 1:1 I switched to become an inclusion teacher assistant. I work with students to meet their Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals and ensured they were making growth in the general education classroom setting. A general education classroom setting is where special education students are mixed in with their peers, but they receive accommodations and services to help them succeed. I moved up with my fourth-grade students who are now almost at the end of their elementary school

journey. I decided that in June when they go to middle school I will be moving on as well. It has become a difficult job with behavior problems increasing the lack of parental support and the overall education system being unsupportive. I decided in my third year of working for VBCPS that I needed to make a change I just didn't know what that looked like for me yet since I was still in school obtaining my bachelor's degree. I knew at that point that I did not want to continue in the education system and that I needed to reevaluate my future career choice.

As mentioned, I work at a summer camp program for a local day camp. I started off as a counselor in 2017 and by 2020 I worked my way up to be a supervisor. I have continued working at the summer camp each year and found out that I enjoy leading. This is why I chose to change my major to leadership, so I could gain knowledge to help me become a better leader. I am about to start my fifth summer as a supervisor in June. The director has asked me to come aboard full-time to help plan events year-round. I will be assisting with planning the logistics and carrying out these events in addition to camp each year. I am excited for this new journey that I will be starting in the next few months.

My Takeaways

In conclusion, my academic and professional experiences have shaped me into the person I am today. I had some bumps along the way, but I was able to overcome these obstacles. My academic experience has taught me to not give up when something becomes difficult. In addition, change is okay and if something is not working changing perspectives is sometimes the

correct answer. My professional experience has taught me that hard work pays off. I worked hard to get where I am now, and I will continue to grow academically and professionally.