

FINDING MY VOICE:

My Doctoral Journey in Teaching, Research, and Service

For most of my life, I have studied voice and sung in choirs. While this has not been my professional vocation, my singing has always been an important part of my life and my self-image. For that reason, I've chosen to discuss my doctoral studies by comparing and contrasting my activities in education with those in voice.

One of the things that I believe about studying voice is that it requires self-knowledge. While a vocal student has a teacher, that teacher can take the student only so far. A student needs to understand his or her own abilities and limitations, whether they be physical, emotional, or intellectual, and learn for him- or herself how to communicate the music. While I believe this is true for all musicians to an extent, I believe that is of the utmost importance to singers, because there is no external instrument.

A similar situation exists for graduate students at the doctoral level. There are faculty members to assist in the process, particularly a student's committee, but the ultimate responsibility for making sure that learning occurs and that the program is completed is that of the student. That is why I have continued to strive to complete the Ed.D. degree, despite the obstacles.

When I say obstacles, I have to say that some have been self-inflicted. I have been pursuing an Ed.D. degree for a long time. I began in the summer of 1998 in the cooperative program between Marshall University and West Virginia University. When Marshall began its own program in 2003, I was offered the opportunity to transfer at that time to that program and leave the West Virginia University program. I did not do that at that time because I thought that I was too close to being finished with my coursework to

transfer.

I was also concerned with the fact that, if I transferred to Marshall, my degree would be granted by the institution for which I work. The historical wisdom in higher education is that institutions tend to avoid hiring their own doctoral graduates. Though I don't currently teach, I thought it might be a possibility in the future and I wanted to stay with the West Virginia University program at that time for that reason. I continued my enrollment in the cooperative program and eventually completed my comprehensive examinations in 2005.

By 2006, however, I realized that I had probably made a mistake in staying with the West Virginia University program. That institution became less helpful for the few remaining students that were in my situation, and Marshall faculty that had been in the cooperative program were no longer recognized as graduate faculty by West Virginia. Eventually, I was faced with either staying with my existing committee and applying to Marshall or staying with West Virginia and structuring an entirely new committee.

I chose to apply to Marshall and did so in May of 2006. I was accepted later in the summer of that year, and that fall began coursework in the Marshall program. Therefore, my doctoral experience has been with two institutions, although I have been enrolled on a relatively continuous basis since I began. For the purposes of this reflection, I will consider both portions of the experience, with an emphasis on the activities and experiences since my admission to the Marshall University program.

As I reflected on this particular "bend in the road," I realized that it was similar to the times that I have changed voice teachers or joined a new choir. My talent and past experience had not changed. I needed to keep my past in perspective, but I also needed to

look forward toward my goals. My singing goals included learning new works and becoming the best possible musician.

In the case of the doctoral program, my primary goal is to complete the program, but completing it will indicate my commitment to scholarship and to the development of knowledge in my field. When I've done that, I believe I will have "found my voice" as a member of the academy and will be prepared for further challenges in my career.

I have chosen to reflect on my experiences in the doctoral program thus far by looking at them as they relate to the three traditional and primary goals of higher education: teaching, research, and service. Because I will be including my recent coursework in the category of research, I will begin with that.

Research

When I began the Marshall Ed.D. program, I needed to take several courses that were in the Marshall program, but not in the cooperative program I had just left. Those courses included "Introduction to Doctoral Studies," which I repeated in order to get the information on the Marshall program; "Research Design," "Current Issues in Higher Education," "Survey Research in Higher Education," "Qualitative Research in Higher Education," and "Ethical Theory."

It would have been easy to become discouraged at this point, because I had been at the A.B.D. stage in the cooperative program, and was now taking additional coursework. However, the courses that I lacked had been developed, for the most part, in order to help students succeed in the program, so I got started in the fall of 2006 with "Research Design."

This was the first course that helped me home in on a topic for my eventual

dissertation. I have known for a long time that I wanted to investigate the organization of the marketing function in higher education, but this course gave me a start in focusing my objectives in performing the study. It also gave me the opportunity to evaluate other research presentations for their strengths and weaknesses. A copy of my preliminary proposal from that course may be found in Appendix A.

I was able to amplify the proposal somewhat when I took “Survey Research in Education.” Here I was able to give further consideration to the type of survey, the variables, and the population I would study. The proposal from that course may be found in Appendix B.

Although I intend to conduct my eventual dissertation study using quantitative techniques, I felt it was beneficial to have the opportunity to increase my skills and knowledge in qualitative techniques. I may want to change to a mixed-methods study for my dissertation, or I may want to do a qualitative follow-up to my dissertation study at some point in the future. I enrolled in “Qualitative Research in Higher Education” in the fall of 2007.

In “Qualitative Research,” I got some experience with in-person and telephone interviews, transcription of those interviews, and coding of the transcripts. Some examples of that work, as well as the final paper, are contained in Appendices C, D, and E.

One of the most important research activities in my program has come quite recently. Working with my committee chair, Dr. Powell Toth, I have written an article that will be submitted to the Journal of Marketing for Higher Education in the near future. Titled “The Leadership Role of the University Magazine,” the article applies leadership

theory to my firsthand knowledge of university magazines. This is an approach that I have not seen in the higher education literature before, and I believe it will provide some important insights into the niche that the magazine occupies in the university framework.

Teaching

One of the options for residency portfolio requirements was to develop an online course. In the spring semester of 2007, fellow student Darrell Taylor and I were given the opportunity to prepare the online version of “Current Issues in Higher Education” in WebCT, which is now a part of Blackboard. We worked on it during that semester and presented our finished online course to Dr. Dennis Anderson, the instructor for the course.

I have chosen to consider this activity as part of teaching, because we concentrated on the contents of the course, the texts selected, and the discussion questions that would be asked of the students. We decided to have the students read and report on one of four texts for their classmates in the first part of the course. This would expose students to several approaches to the current state of higher education without the necessity of purchasing multiple textbooks. For the second part of the course, we wrote discussion questions to which students were expected not only to respond, but to initiate online conversation. The instructor’s role in the course was to moderate the discussions as necessary and provide feedback for the students on the reports and responses they wrote.

A description of the online version of “Current Issues in Higher Education” we produced is contained in Appendix F. Some printed-out examples of the WebCT pages are contained in Appendix G.

A second activity I undertook in the teaching category was to co-teach the “Writing for Publication” course with Dr. Frances Simone. We worked together during the fall semester of 2007 and the spring semester of 2008. This course is designed to assist doctoral students with preparing manuscripts for submission to publications in their respective fields.

Because of my background in editing and producing publications, I was able to be of assistance to both the instructor and the students. Each paper on which the students worked was revised in several drafts before the final version was submitted. I participated in “writing workshop” group sessions, in which teams of four students reviewed each other’s work and provided feedback. I also made comments to individual students electronically.

Giving thoughtful feedback is an art, and I appreciated the opportunity to become more skilled in this process. Most of the students were quite receptive to the suggestions I had. An example of a paper on which I made comments is contained in Appendix H. A letter from Dr. Simone, confirming this experience, is contained in Appendix I.

Service

Over the last several years, I have been able to work on several projects that have been of service to Marshall’s Graduate School of Education and Professional Development. One was the development of recruitment advertising for the Ed.D. program cohort that began in 2007.

In order to recruit for this program, several “open house” events were scheduled so that prospective cohort members could meet faculty and learn more about the program. Relying on my experience with the doctoral program, I was able to create a newspaper ad

that communicated the benefits of the Ed.D. program to those prospective students.

The advertising program was a success. Using a budget of just \$2,000, the small-space ad created interest and awareness among the target audience. The open houses were well attended, and a full complement of students was recruited for the 2007 cohort, which was based in the Flatwoods area of West Virginia.

Appendix J contains the ad I wrote and designed for the Flatwoods cohort and Appendix K shows the newspaper schedule and budget.

I also assisted the Graduate School of Education and Professional Development and Interim Dean Rudy Pauley by taking a leadership role in the post-Commencement hooding recognition ceremony for graduates in May 2008. I was able to use my experience with previous hooding ceremonies in order to develop a plan for the 2008 event, which differed in some respects and was taking place as a post-Commencement event for the first time..

Significantly, faculty members were not available to assist in the event because they were at the Commencement ceremony and arriving at the same time as the graduate participants. I needed to develop a plan and have it in place, prepare instructions, and coordinate the event as it was occurring. Because the event was new, faculty members needed to be coached on what was going to happen just before it happened.

Appendix L contains several examples of the materials prepared for this event.

Most recently, I assisted Dr. Teresa Eagle with the program for the Southern Region Conference on Educational Administration (SRCEA) in late 2008. Marshall University, under the direction of Dr. Eagle, was hosting the conference in Charleston. I was able to work with the materials she had under preparation and amplify them with a

cover design showing color photographs of the Charleston area. I also took care of the printing and assembly of the program booklets once the design and proofing were complete. Appendix M contains the cover of the program created for the conference and Appendix N contains a memo from Dr. Eagle regarding the project.

Reflection

Self-knowledge is an important aspect both in pursuing a doctoral degree program and in studying voice. In both, the student must be aware of his or her talents and limitations, as well as how best to achieve the goal in mind.

In pursuing this program, I have discovered abilities that I did not know I had and developed some existing ones. I have been able to coach fellow graduate students and help them improve their writing. I have continued the study of statistics and quantitative methods that I started as a master's degree student. I've also been introduced to qualitative research. Most importantly, I have developed an original thesis and, with the assistance of my faculty mentor and chair, turned it into an article submitted for publication.

Of course, I have also come face-to-face with personality traits and limitations that I have dealt with my entire academic career. I procrastinate! I try not to do it, but it is a long-standing trait. I don't have a problem writing, but I need "think time" to come up with exactly *what* I am going to write. I need to control this tendency as I prepare my proposal and dissertation.

Another issue that I have faced in pursuing this degree program is the fact that I did not have a background in classroom education before starting the doctoral program. Many of my fellow doctoral students have experience as classroom teachers; this was

something I did not have. I think this was a disadvantage, although not insurmountable. I have learned a great deal from fellow students, and I think I have also been able to share with them some of my background in higher education administration.

Another situation is both an advantage and disadvantage. By being an employee of Marshall, I have had the opportunity to know the Leadership Studies faculty members outside of the classroom situation, a different way than most students. This has been good. However, it also took more time for me to select committee members than for more students, because I did not want to offend people that I knew. I also felt, perhaps, more pressure on classroom performance when in a class taught by someone I knew well or had worked with in another way.

Perhaps most importantly, I needed to stop looking back at what had gone wrong in my pursuit of the degree and the mistakes I had made. It's difficult, but I think I can do that. Musicians need to do that also, so that they don't fall behind in tempo and make even more mistakes. It's a lesson I need to keep in mind for the work ahead.

As I reflect on my progress on the program to date, the culmination is in sight. It has been a rocky road, but one that I was not willing to give up traveling. I look forward to the next steps in the process "joining the chorus" of doctoral program graduates.