



Educating through Leadership and Ethics

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"The greatest tragedy in life is someone with sight, but no vision." Helen Keller

A Graduate School Journey



My father was born in 1925. After completing the fourth grade, my father began working to help support his family. I have a framed copy of my mother's high school diploma, with a concentration on sewing. I was born the same year Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated; my mother was 37 at the time. Given the era, it is clear as to why my parents placed much emphasis on my attending college. As long as I can remember, my parents said, "When you go to college. . ." They never mentioned the "why." It was never explained to me the incredible opportunity I was being given. No one ever said that my mother, daughter of a share cropper, would never have been extended the same opportunity.

I went to school where my dad could afford to send me, IU. I desperately wanted to be a Michigan Wolverine. They had an awesome football team, but out of state tuition was expensive. So, off I went to IU...Because my brother went there and because my friends went there. I was supposed to go to college. I was ENTITLED!

Since I was African-American and the first generation to attend college in my family, I was a part of a special program called *Groups*. Students accepted in the *Groups* program

were given special counseling and attended college courses the summer before their freshman year on the campus of the university to which they were accepted; it is just like freshman year, but with a lot less students. Groups participants stayed in the dorms, ate in the cafeteria, and even attended classes.

Like many of my peers, I went to classes, book signings, parties and concerts. I was exposed to new things like history, culture, basketball rivalries and night clubs. I met famous people like Alice Walker and John Cougar Mellancamp. I did not realize how truly fortunate I was.

Now, I am a single mother with a full-time job as an elementary school art teacher. Someone asked me if I had ever considered going to graduate school and getting my master's degree. Deep down inside me, buried beneath the wife, mom, and divorcee, something stirred. Could I be a single parent, teacher, and student? Did I deserve to spend that kind of money and time to do something for myself? The answer I gave myself was a resounding NO! I was given the opportunity to go back to school and I, thinking myself unworthy, declined.

Years later I felt a burning desire to go back to school and learn. That week I got an informational flier in my school mailbox at about a district cohort. Despite internal challenges to apply, I did and was approved by

central office and Texas A & M University-San Antonio. Somehow, by the grace of God I was one of the chosen few.

I felt entitled to go to IU and be an undergraduate student. Black history was not taught when I was growing up because it was still happening. Therefore, I was ignorant to the fact that I should have felt privileged. When I was accepted to the cohort I felt privileged. I had worked hard for many years and sacrificed so much for so many. I am entitled to this position in the graduate program. I **will** do great things.

I have traveled a long distance in thirty odd years. I have gone from *entitlement to privilege to privilege to entitlement*.

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Navigating Leadership: Reflections from the First-Year Tenure Track



In August 2016, I began my first year as a tenure track faculty member at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Having had higher education teaching experience during my doctorate program, I felt I was prepared for the role of an Assistant Professor. I knew I was responsible for teaching, service, and research. I began with the big picture in mind; two goals that directed me and my work during my initial year. First, I had a goal of collaborating with colleagues to expand my knowledge of navigating the academy and second, I was determined to empower teachers to be effective leaders in literacy education.

Reflection is a powerful tool towards success. Now, a year later, I am reminded of the challenges and triumphs over the last academic year. It is important to note that neither one had greater impact than the other

and that both positioned me on a strong foundation. Faculty will experience various challenges and triumphs over their career. Here are five practices I used to help monitor and consider my goals, challenges, and triumphs:

1. Communication is vital for success and it is important to remember that not all communication will be comfortable, but still necessary.
2. Journaling has been both therapeutic and serves as a reflective strategy. This personal interaction with a journal allows you to be honest about new experiences in the academic role.
3. Time management is essential. Maintain a weekly schedule and make time to write daily.
4. Be open minded and approachable. These two traits will allow collaboration among colleagues and students.
5. Traits of a leader are visible even when you are not in a leadership position. When others recognize your leadership, accept the opportunity to support the overall goals of the institution.

These practices have influenced the approach that I take as I move in to this new academic year. So, as we enter new classrooms, engage with students, and greet new colleagues, I'll remind you as my mentors often do, set goals, strive for excellence, and always hold yourself to the highest expectations!

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