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2/19/14

Learner’s Essay

Essay as a Learner

In the early winter months of 2009 as a high school senior, I applied to Bloomsburg University as an Early Childhood and Special Education major. I thought I had it all figured out; I wanted to become an art therapist and work with children and young adults with special needs. When I was accepted to the program at Bloomsburg in the spring of 2010, I couldn’t wait to start my college career. I never really wanted to be a teacher, but I didn’t know which major I should choose to get into the profession I wanted to do, so education seemed like the smart way to go. However, shortly after classes started in the fall of 2010, I knew I picked the wrong major. I quickly changed from education to undeclared, so I started taking general education classes such as Art History, Intro to Astronomy, and Principles of Sociology, but I couldn’t find a topic I was really interested in. It wasn’t until my fall semester sophomore year that I was introduced to the Mass Communications department. One of the older girls in my sorority, Jenn Sensky, was a Public Relations major, and she knew I was undeclared and told me to look into the PR major. I decided to take Dr. Richard Ganahl’s PR: Theory and Practice class and immediately fell in love with the program! Dr. Ganahl was so passionate when he talked about his experiences with Public Relations, and I could see myself doing the things he talked about. I applied to the Mass Communications department PR track the following spring semester and was accepted.

During my first two semesters at Bloomsburg, I didn’t really care that much about my coursework: I skipped too many classes and didn’t study enough for exams. Somehow, I ended up with a 3.0 GPA after those two semesters. Once I started taking Mass Comm classes, I started to care a great deal more about my schoolwork. I attended classes more often and actually paid attention to what each professor was saying. I found that I didn’t even have to study much harder because I actually cared about the topics being discussed, and I paid attention in class. I became more attentive, and that attentiveness only increased during the rest of my college career.

I didn’t know this going into the PR major, but there is a lot of group work going on in each class. I was never a big fan of group collaboration in high school, and quite honestly, I’m still not a big fan. There are always two types of people when it comes to group work: those who put their best effort into the project, and those who pass the work off on their peers. I always found myself in the preceding group, and that became quite problematic for me. As I entered into 300 and 400 level classes, I felt the stress of group projects weighing down on me heavily. Nonetheless, one of my favorite group collaborations was definitely in Dr. Ganahl’s PR: Cases and Problems class. Each semester, the class picks an organization to do a campaign for, and my class picked Bloomsburg’s Annual Bocce Bash for the Special Olympics. The class of about 20 spilt into smaller groups of five or six; I was apart of the Social Media group. I think Dr. Ganahl knows who is reliable and who isn’t, so he asked me to be a point person for the Social Media aspect of the campaign along with my fellow group member, Kat Samuels. We were in charge of creating a Facebook page and Twitter account, along with setting up the Indiegogo account that we used to crowd fund. Through many different fundraising opportunities and our main special event that consisted of a student participation bocce tournament on the quad, we managed to raise close to $1,500 for Bocce Bash. Although I had a wonderful time organizing and participating in the campaign in such a hands-on fashion, I was also extremely stressed for an entire semester because I picked up the slack for other members of the group who didn’t put in much effort. Overall, I believe I am now better rounded after being a point person on the campaign, but during that time, I felt immense pressure. Through group collaboration, I have become a better leader and have resolved many of my own time management issues. However, people handle group work in different ways, so I think there needs to be a better balance of group collaboration verse personal work.

Another rich learning experience for me occurred when I was a student in Social Foundations of the Mass Media with Dr. David Magolis. Throughout the course of the semester, I was expected to research a topic dealing with social media and write an extensive academic paper on the topic. I chose to look at the relationship between social media and acquiring jobs and if posting on social media accounts would help or hinder ones chances of finding a job. As more and more social networking sites are appearing, more stories are being told about individuals who have not received a job or have been fired from a job due to their posts on social media. On the contrary, sites such as LinkedIn have helped increase ones chances of obtaining a job. It was interesting to research and learn about a topic that I have grown up hearing about. Increasing my knowledge about a topic that could potentially affect me in the near future was a significant moment in my learning career.

Throughout my career at Bloomsburg, I have found my experience to be rather integrative. Each student is required to earn 53 credits in general education classes. Personally, I think 53 credits is too many, but I have taken interesting general education courses and electives that I have found useful to my Public Relations major. I have taken Principles of Economics I and II, Intro to Business, and Principles of Marketing which are all useful if I choose to go into the business side of Public Relations. I am currently taking an Intro to Digital Arts course which is always helpful to increase my number of skills and creativity. Still, one of my favorite electives I have taken at Bloomsburg was English Grammar. I have never been terribly good at math or science, but I’ve always had an interest in writing and literature. Throughout grade school, grammar was, and still is, my strong suit. When I saw that Bloomsburg offered a grammar course, I signed up to take it immediately! During the semester, I was required to do a small research project with a group of three other students. My group decided to look into how grammar changes on Twitter to fit the 140-character limit without losing the integrity of the message. This topic overlapped nicely with my PR major. Public Relations relies heavily on social media sites like Twitter, so researching how to keep the integrity of the message in a 140-character limit was crucial. The course positively corresponded nicely with my major.

In regards to the Public Relations track, I was required to take Newswriting and a Mass Comm Capstone class. Even though I am not a Journalism major, I have found it very helpful to take a Newswriting course. It is always important to learn the basic skills of writing informational and newsworthy articles. In Dr. Jason Genovese’s Mass Comm Capstone class, I am learning how to write television scripts and what makes for a good TV episode. I am not a Telecommunications major, but knowing these skills will definitely increase my chances of landing a job when I graduate. Even though integration of knowledge can sometimes be challenging because the course material can be so unfamiliar, integration is very important in regards to education.

Although integration through general education and elective courses can be interesting and useful, I love my Public Relations classes. I chose the PR track because I think there are many different directions I could go when I graduate. Since social media and the Internet are booming industries, the Public Relations field is constantly changing. I think Dr. Ganahl has done an exceptional job teaching me the “old” ways of PR while also showing me how new and emergent media works in the field. In the PR realm, it is extremely important to know what’s going on in the world. The more information you know, the farther ahead you’ll get. I believe I’ve been able to practice that theory through my PR classes at BU. I even have the CNN app and look at the news stories every day!

I also think taking classes like Emergent Media and Multimedia with Dr. Magolis has increased my media literacy. Everyday, we are being bombarded with hundreds of thousands of media messages. Those who have a low level of media literacy are unable to filter out insignificant messages and unable to grasp the important ones. Also, those who are media illiterate don’t have the ability to question why things are done a certain way. Before I started taking Mass Comm classes, I never really thought about why certain commercials were shown on a specific television station during a particular show. I never thought about why Fox News portrayed a news story one way while ABC portrayed that same news story a different way. I didn’t think about media conglomerates or even understand that term. After taking these classes, I have become more media literate. I now understand why, for instance, MTV airs numerous tampon commercials during the new episode of Teen Mom 2 (generally females, early teens to late twenties watch the show). I now know that Fox news has typically more conservative views while ABC news is commonly more liberal. I now know what a media conglomerate is along with the six largest media conglomerates in the nation. I pride myself in becoming media literate. Since the Mass Communications field is constantly growing and changing, media literacy is extremely important to be well rounded and successful. After receiving the basis for becoming media literate, my literacy can only grow from here.

In regards to the main professor in the PR track, I appreciate and respect Dr. Ganahl immensely. I think he’s shared his experiences as an effective learning tool, and I look up to him as a mentor, however, I think having more than one professor in the track would broaden my knowledge of the PR field. In my opinion, that is the greatest downfall of the Mass Comm department. Students would be better off having as many different professors and experiences as they can, because the same information class after class can get dull after a while.

During my time at BU, I’ve already had to face ethical issues in the field of PR. It is so easy to cheat and plagiarize and lie when it comes to writing a news article or posting a blog, but the professors in the department have instilled so much respected and trust for their students that breaking that respect and trust would be much more painful than receiving a poor grade on an assignment. My professors believe in me enough that I haven’t had to cheat and plagiarize and lie. I will carry their respect, trust, and belief with me as I enter into a career in the PR field.

Through my experiences at Bloomsburg University, specifically in the Mass Communications department, I do feel as though I am ready to step out into the real world. Dr. Ganahl and my other professors have given me the material and confidence I need to be successful with what I wish to do. I have had an overall positive learning experience, and I would suggest that incoming freshman look into applying to the Mass Communications department to receive not only an informative learning experience, but also a fun learning experience that they’ll never forget.