My Time Through PELSA and Everything I Plan to Do

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Starting all they back in the summer of 2015, when I was looking at graduate programs to get my master's degree, I had no idea where I wanted to go or what program to learn from. I knew that at the time I needed to get a master's degree to go into the field that I wanted to go to, but not what I wanted to get out of the program. Summer of 2015, middle of June, I decided to explore different schools to learn more about programs, one of those destinations was San Diego State University. I also explored programs in the Portland, OR area and in Seattle, WA, but after researching these places, the program and the campus at San Diego State University sold me on where I was going to go. I took the GRE during that summer and then entered my final year at my undergraduate school. Looking at financials and where I was mentally at the time, I decided to postpone my entrance into Graduate School.

After graduating with my bachelor's degree, I worked as an event coordinator knowing that I wanted to work in student activities on a college campus and working in the event field would allow me to gather experience and insight into planning and executing events. This experience granted me a lot of experience working with other people, building up my event skills and supervision skills, but I still was not where I wanted to be. I was closer, but it wasn't perfect. I then had some personal financial issues happen and I had to leave the event job I had and move back in with my family. I then worked in a retail job, starting at an entry-level position, but quickly working my way up to a leadership, almost supervisory position where I oversaw the front-end of the store and helped with coordination of our front-end staff. This work allowed me to continue to work on my supervision skills and customer service skills but was further from where I wanted to be in life, helping students grow. I then became determined to apply to grad

school, specifically at San Diego State University, and work towards where I wanted to be and doing what I needed to do and what would be helpful to others.

In the beginning of 2020, before the pandemic hit, I was able to find myself a professional position as a Residential Coordinator at Western Washington University. Albeit the position was temporary, I was able to work on skills in the higher education world. I was able to fine-tune my supervision skills as they apply to higher education and be able to help students develop and grow. This opportunity took a drastic turn when the pandemic hit and changed everyone's roles. I then transitioned to an event/social planner and working with facilities. This was providing me insight and experience that I hadn't wanted to learn before but gave me experience as it coordinates to other departments and engagements. This transition took away traditional aspects to my role but gave me opportunities to explore new aspects to the field. This position then ended in the summertime, which allowed me a little bit of time to prepare for grad school as I had gotten into SDSU to start in the fall of 2020.

We were in the thick of the pandemic and such that everyone had classes online. With this, my classes were all online and thus I had no need to move to San Diego to attend classes. This allowed me to stay at home, work another job and save money while attending classes. Some classes were fun where I would be taking class in my mom's office, and she would sit in the office and be working on her projects while listening in on what was happening in class. I tried to make connections with people in my cohort as best as I could from another state, but I was had found solace knowing that I wasn't alone in being in another state while doing classes online. I had found a graduate assistantship at San Diego State University as an Instructional Student Assistant where I helped teach sections of a course to first-year students. This provided me experience in another area of higher education that I hadn't thought I had wanted to work in

before, which was in the world of academic affairs, rather than student affairs. I fell in love with

the work I was doing and was enjoying working with students as they "tele-commuted" into

class from all parts of the world. Towards the end of the semester, this assistantship was coming

to an end, and I was looking for another position I could apply for to gather insight and

experience in. Luckily for me, my supervisor of the instructional role provided me an

opportunity that was opening up in their main department, Residential Education as a Front Desk

Security Manager. I had interviewed for this role during interview days for this program but had

not been offered the role at the time. I interviewed again for the role and was offered it this time.

I took this and it provided me with another barrier that I hadn't thought about or foreseen before,

moving to a new city in another state, starting a new job. This became my first time living

outside of the state of Washington. I was not only excited, but nervous.

　　At the start of the spring semester of my first year, I was finally down here at San Diego

State University, but with my classes remaining online. This new endeavor was exciting, but I

was met with a few obstacles with my role, some of them being that I was a mid-year hire

without proper departmental training, and no support from cohort mates as I began this role. I

was left trying to figure out things on my own and working with my supervisor and finding a

way to work through what we needed. I also was offered the opportunity to take an additional

class, which I did so as a way to reduce future workloads. This additional class added more stress

with the fact that I was in a new state, in a new role, working with new people who didn't know

me, but provided me some additional knowledge earlier than many of the rest of my cohort.

　　The end of the academic year approached, I decided not to find a summer internship as I

needed time to focus on myself and get settled in. I lucked out in that the department I was

working in needed assistance over the summer, so I was able to help the department as campus

decisions were affecting what Fall 2021 was going to look like with re-opening and COVID policies and procedures relaxing and modifying for repopulation. Through this, a lot of decisions were made for the department, and I was able to help with some of those decisions and the work that was done for preparation. Fall 2021 came and I was able to start my role at the beginning of the academic year with proper training. I was taking the two other classes that I was supposed to take, plus my internship course that the program planned for the last semester. This internship provided me with new opportunities and growth as an individual, as a professional, and with my networking. I met more people by working in the Student Organizations and Activities office in the Office of the Dean of Students. I worked with event planning and programming, where I really settled in where I want to work and plan to do so in my future. I was missing out on cohort discussions that occurred in the third class that I had taken in the spring, so I missed some discussions and decisions about the Spring 2022 modality, but was in a spot that I mentally needed to be in. For an in-person program, and the first 3 of the 4 semesters being online, my mental health was taking a toll, and I really pushed and verbally shared that we should have some sort of in-person aspect to the last semester but was met with a lot of disdain and pushback on other students' preferences, over my needs.

Enter Spring 2022, the final semester of my graduate program. I have been through a lot, worked with many individuals in and outside of my cohort and program, learned more about how I can help students, and what is needed in student affairs. I have learned how to think equitably and how we need to be looking out for every students needs and not just generalizing. I learned that I have a lot of growing left to work on and processes to process through. This program had given me a wide set of knowledge and abilities and helped by shining light on parts of the field that still require work. As I go forward in my career, I plan to help work on these aspects.

Post-Graduation Plans

Before graduation, I am working on trying to obtain a full-time role that I can continue with right after graduating. This has been a hassle and a half as I try to figure out where I am working and what my role will be. As seen in one of my revised goals, I have been working towards helping create a new role here at SDSU for grad students. This role has been deemed a hybrid role where it is a full-time role, but 20 hours are in Residential Education and the other 20 hours are in a separate office. My work has been creating the position in Student Organizations and Activities. The original goal of this position was to start during spring semester, and I was to be brought on as an emergency hire. The process for this position to be approved through HR has taken a lot longer than originally planned and this position hasn't happened, yet. This position is currently being dubbed the Assistant Program Coordinator and is, apparently, still in the works to happen here at San Diego State University.

As this APC role has been postponed, my other plans were attending The Placement Exchange in order to try to find more employment opportunities at other institutions I wouldn't normally think of. I applied and interviewed at a few institutions, as well as had a few institutions reach out to me to get me to interview with them. I wasn't continued in a few institutions' processes but have gone onto second- and third-round interviews at a few other institutions. My current plan is to be offered the Residence Hall Coordinator position here at San Diego State University within Residential Education and am currently waiting on the process to the third-round interview. This is the top priority position, as this department is who I have been working for with my assistantship and I feel like I have a lot of growth left here before I find my next endeavor. With this being my top choice, and the work I put in through The Placement Exchange, I also have Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, WA, University of California

Santa Cruz, and University of California Santa Barbara as the next few in line in the event I don't

get selected at SDSU.

Staying in this department will provide me an opportunity to learn more about this role

and the university, as well as provide me the opportunity to work with this new hybrid role and

help mold it into a fully functioning graduate student role. This will provide me experience in the

HR realm, as well as growing my supervisory, advisory, and mentorship skills as I work with

incoming students moving forward. I plan to engage with students in an educational sense in

consistently asking questions and helping others in asking more questions – in ways that allows

them to lean and grow.

Readiness to Pursue Post-Graduation Plans

Through completing this program, and all the learning that happened along the way, I feel

that I am set up to spot the inequalities and inequities in the field and has allowed me to be active

in trying to make sure that I am serving students and reducing any barriers they may come

across. Listening to many guest speakers who have been in this field and have worked with the

current climate, helped shed light on areas in which I, as a new professional, can come in and

help make things more efficient and better for all students. The other aspect this program helped

me process through is reflection. Prior to this program, I did very little reflection, but I now

spend a lot of time reflecting on my actions and my experiences, which helps guide my practice

moving forward.

I plan to incorporate reflections in my work with students as I continue in my work. I

would like to provide opportunities and thought around what are the students' desires and wants.

Provide the students with opportunities to think about what they have done and how their

previous experiences help guide their future plans and goals.

This program has also allowed me to think about where I want to go and what I want to do. This program has helped me learn to expand upon my networking skills and my engagement with other professionals. My cohort mates have also helped me learn new positions that I didn't know existed before and how there are more diverse populations that I hadn't been introduced to before. This has helped educate me in how different students need different services, and that these services exist in offices and departments that I didn't know of before.

As for additional ways this program could've been more effective at helping me develop my skills would be providing me with in-person experiences and practices. I am a very hands-on learner and I missed out on the in-person learning due to the pandemic and the department listening to the majority of the program's wants instead of the needs of the minority. I need to engage in in-person praxis, and with our field being more heavily in-person focused, having no in-person praxis really hindered my learning of the material and overall outcome of the program. I was lucky in obtaining a graduate assistantship that had me move and live here in-person and work with students outside of the program, but I missed the curricular aspect to in-person learning and the interactions that comes with.

Mastery of Program Learning Outcomes

This program consists of 8 learning outcomes, or hard-set deliverables, that every student should meet as they progress through the program. The 8 PLOs as listed on the PELSA curriculum website are:

1. Explain how the theoretical foundations of student learning, development, and success can be implemented and evaluated in daily practice *(ARP 610, ARP 620, ED 690, ARP 621, ARP 755, ARP 624, ARP 760, ED 795A, ARP 623, and ED 795B)*
2. Apply self-awareness and self-regulation practices towards one's own leadership strengths and identify areas of continued development *(ARP 610, ARP 620, ARP 621, ARP 622, ARP 747, ARP 624, ARP 760, and ARP 623)*

3. Identify varying leadership approaches and explain strategies that facilitate meaningful and productive dialogue *(ARP 610, ARP 620, ED 690, ARP 621, ARP 747, ARP 624, ARP 760, ARP 623, and ED 795B)*
4. Identify student success and equity issues within postsecondary education and propose leadership strategies within the context of entry-level positions to address these issues *(ARP 620, ED 690, ARP 747, ARP 755, and ED 795B)*
5. Engage in meaningful outcomes-based assessment of collaboratively designed student learning and development programs and initiatives within the context of entry-level positions *(ARP 620, ED 690, ARP 621, ARP 624, ARP 760, ED 795A, ARP 623, and ED 795B)*
6. Utilize scholarly literature on student success to inform practices that advance access and equity in postsecondary institutions *(ARP 620, ED 690, ARP 755, ED 795A, ARP 623, and ED 795B)*
7. Communicate ideas and concepts effectively in speaking and writing *(ARP 610, ARP 620, ARP 621, ARP 622, ARP 755, ARP 624, ARP 760, ED 795A, ARP 623, and ED 795B)*
8. Employ equity-mindedness to work collaboratively with diverse group members in diverse settings *(ARP 610, ARP 620, ARP 621, ARP 747, ARP 755, ARP 624, ARP 760, ED 795A, ARP 623, and ED 795B)*

These learning outcomes are also aligned to goals of this program as well as what courses are aligned with these outcomes. I have included in parenthesis which courses each of the PLOs aligned with for me and my learning, but also recognize that this may differ from the programs alignment as each student's learning is unique to them and how they learn.

I feel like this program had done a good job of interweaving the Program Learning Outcomes into and through each class we took. After comparing, it was interesting to note that some of the courses I found checked off some of the program learning outcomes, but the program doesn't have that aligned on the public-facing website. This has prompted me to reflect on each of my classes I have taken and thought through my learning in that course. As I had stated above, student learning is different to each student as it depends on historical context, learning environment, coursework delivery, presence/absence of a global pandemic, and how I learn as an individual. I wouldn't change anything about this, other than revisiting how these apply to a remote learner compared to an in-person learner.

Legacy Statement

(Fast forward to the year 2070) Working with students and helping them find their passions, grow their passions, and pushing them to pursue their goals has allowed me to enjoy an amazing life. Helping work with my colleagues in finding new and creative ways to engage students and provide educational differences in the lives of many, has filled my heart and mind with so much compassion and joy. Working to rethink what past student affairs professionals job positions looked like and reworking them into a more student-focused position that allowed for greater collaboration and better understanding across many departments and campuses has been a goal of mine since I was in grad school for my first master's degree. I remember working with my site supervisor of my internship course in rethinking how our work could be more impactful to the offices and departments, then turning around and pushing out a new role and watching this role re-inspire student affairs professionals across the world has been amazing to see and learn from as these positions grow and adapt to new ideas and eradicate barriers students encounter. I can't wait to see where this takes the field of student affairs and remaining to stay focused on student well-being and development.

It is important to always ask questions about why things are the way they are. Be open to trying something new and breaking the status quo. Be creative in how to approach a situation and how we help others learn from poor situations. Then bring it all back to your "why?" Why are you doing what you are doing? Make sure to take time to reflect – are your actions and experiences feeding your "why"? How can you adjust, what can you do to realign your intentions and aspirations to make sure that it comes back to your "why" and how that is serving students. Question why policies are put in place. Question why procedures are done a specific way. Think

differently and be accepting of failure. You won't get it right every time, but as long as you try, it can only help.

       For all the next generation student affairs professionals, please continue by sticking up for the students' aspirations. Higher Education has continuously been treated like a business, and you should help work to de-establish it as a business and re-establish it as a service. Then when you have done that, take what your students tell you, and make sure that people hear what they have to say. The students we all serve come to us to be heard, and we must continue that into the future so that students have the space and the help to achieve all that they can and want. You are there to help them, so do it.

References

SDSU PELSA. (2021). Curriculum. ARPE | College of Education | SDSU.

   https://education.sdsu.edu/arpe/ma-student-affairs/curriculum