Self-Reflection on My Student Development

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I have answered so many times about what I want to say to the incoming college freshmen based on my own experience. I try my best to offer them with careful and thoughtful suggestions. After taking this course, I start to think about whether my experience reveals the same principles of some student development theories. I would like to re-evaluate myself and to learn the knowledge and skills of applying student development theories.

First Year at Arkansas Tech University

I started my undergraduate study at Arkansas Tech University in fall 2011 after graduating from Danville High School as an exchange student there. I knew that I had lots of advantages compared to other international students. I felt more connected on campus with lots of staff whom I met on Tech Time-Out Day. The special feeling gave me lots of confidence when introducing myself to new people. Although I was taking eighteen credit hours in my first semester, it was not challenging for me since I had been trained so well by the Chinese education system under great academic pressure. The biggest challenge for me in the first semester was to learn how to work in the international office as my first on-campus job. I was the youngest one in the office, so most people did not expect me to work on any important projects. I was only told to do some filing and to answer the phone. Answering the phone was the most scared thing for me. I could not understand people very well especially people called from oversees. I did not like to transfer phone calls because I always missed some basic information of who were calling and their issues. However, there was one afternoon that I received lots of phone calls and was told to transfer the call. In the end, I was able to handle it pretty well. The truth was one graduate assistant of international office pretended to call the office from his cell phone so that I could get

enough practice and gain the confidence. I really appreciated his help. I also learned how to work independently and efficiently from him and another graduate assistant.

In my second semester, I started to really enjoy working in the international office because I was assigned to do some complex and meaningful tasks. I liked to prove my value through contributions. With the help of the new assistant director of international office, I had the opportunity to organize and present a state-wide meeting and go to a world-wide conference. After those two wonderful graduate assistants both graduated and left in May, I felt more responsibilities that I needed to take as an experienced student worker. I came up with a procedure manual about how to help prospective international students apply for VISA and prepare them for a successful VISA interview. Especially when I started to train the new student workers, I recognized my accomplishments and also started to take responsibilities actively, not passively anymore.

Second Year of College

One thing I learned from my second year of college was I would never know how much latent capacity I could have. My level of potential power just continued increasing by successfully managing to do lots of things. To keep up with the heavy academic work and all the social involvements, I just had to keep challenging myself and use that gained confidence as motivation and encouragement. Of course, there should be a limit on the pressure given to myself. Luckily, my academic adviser did not approve me to take over eighteen credit hours in one semester even I desired to do so. His reason was that he simply wanted me to have some fun in college. At that time, I had that one common idea with the majority of international students on the purpose of studying abroad. The only thing in my mind was to finish the undergraduate studies as soon as possible to save time and money. I would seldom do things that were only for

fun. I did not consider myself as a sophomore in my second year of college because I filled up my schedule with all kinds of duties.

Junior and Senior Year

My last year as an undergraduate was really stressful. I worked twenty hours per week, took those challenging higher-level courses, and also needed to take GRE and apply for doctorate program of Audiology. Especially the first semester of my last year was like a disaster. I had to choose not to attend some events. I spent less time with less important friends. I was very worried what if I cannot get accepted into Audiology program. I kind of regret that I should not push myself too hard in order to finish my undergraduate studies one year earlier. I felt I was just not so prepared for everything coming to me at that time. Life kept going on and I just needed to do my best no matter what situation I was in. It was my first semester that I was not in Dean's List. I realized I should not continue that route even though I have planned that route for years. I knew it was not the right one for me. Why did I still faked to behave like I can handle anything? I wish someone could suggest to me that finishing earlier is not the only way to show my ability to be successful and I should slow down a little bit then I may have better results.

Commented [RC1]: I agree; I don't like seeing students graduate in under 4 years.

The admission to Audiology was very competitive, so I thought about my second plan in case I could not get accepted. The only difficult part about applying for College Student Personnel was probably to convince myself and my families whether this is the path that I should work for. I knew I had experience and passion to work in the international education field. I still need to make a clear plan that I can see a bright future of it. After graduation, when I was notified that I was not accepted into Audiology, I officially applied CSP master program and GA position at Arkansas Tech University. When I look back now, I really appreciate my past experience because all of those little things helped me get to know who I really am.

My Student Development

As what I have mentioned about my role changing in the international office, this learning experience indicates Schlossberg's transition theory (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). The phone answering practice that I got from that graduate assistant will be considered as an unanticipated transition. The impact from this unpredictable event altered my personal aspect as a student worker in the international office. It might take me longer time to prepare myself to become a high-qualified member in the office without that surprising training. Of course, this challenging training may make a negative impact on me depending on the stress capacity. If I felt embarrassed instead of encouraging at that time, I might just want to give up working there. Therefore, there are four major sets of factors that influence one's ability to cope with a transition. And they are situation, self, support, and strategies, known as the 4 S's. The level of the 4 S's will affect how an individual copes with transition effectively (Evans et al., 2010, pp. 215-217). In my case, I had that excuse of being the youngest one in the office. I knew everyone in that office was very friendly and they all tried to help me. The strategy used by that graduate assistant is gentle. So all these four factors successfully helped me transit through working in the international office. In addition, the graduation of those two graduate students was an anticipated transition event to me. Their predictable leaving made me to grow so that I could take more responsibilities and be relied on by other people in the office. Three-year-long working experience in the international office really helped me grow in a very different way.

Baxter Magolda's Model of Epistemological Reflection really matches my knowledge patterns through these three years. Baxter Magolda defined epistemological reflection as assumptions about the nature, limits, and certainty of knowledge. In my freshman year, I thought the academic courses were not challenging to me because I could receive all the basic knowledge.

This is considered as absolute knowing in this model, which knowledge is viewed as certain. At that time, I thought I should be successful as long as I could keep all A's. In my second year of college, after my advisor inspired me about enjoying the college life, I entered the second stage, transitional knowing, which I understand the importance of interpersonal knowing and impersonal knowing. Working with peer groups is not just sharing what we know to each other, it is also about improving our knowledge beyond the basic received knowledge. The independent knowing level happened to me in the last year of college. I had to consider my needs and desires as preparing for the future paths. Talking with professionals and my families provided me new opinions, but my own idea was truly valued. The contextual knowing, the final stage, involves the belief that the legitimacy of knowledge claims is determined contextually (Evans et al., 2010, pp. 125-127). I was not into this final stage yet as an undergraduate.

The big struggle for me towards the end of undergraduate life was the career path switching. Marcia's Ego Identity Status theory applies to me. Marcia identified four identity statuses, which are foreclosure, moratorium, identity achievement, and diffusion (Evans et al., 2010, p. 53). After three-year of learning for Audiology, finally I chose to study a totally different field. In this new field, I really enjoy it and have achieved the best I can do. This is definitely the state of identity achievement. My past campus involvement experience supported me the strong foundation of skills and the confidence with student affairs. I am happy with the path I choose to step on now.

When I reevaluate my reflection of student development during undergraduate experience, I wish I could be introduced to these student development theories when I was a freshman. These theories are not just showing some common patterns among college students development, they actually provide great models for students to refer when they need to look for or to confirm the

path they have chosen. Theories are still being developed, and our college students are also

growing in their unique ways.

Reference

Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F. M., Patton, L. D., & Renn, K. A. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd Ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.