

# Program Synthesis

I have always prided myself on being a lifelong learner and I have never been one to sit down and rest. I guess that is why I was so enthusiastic about beginning a journey toward a doctoral degree on July 4, 2008. I can remember driving to the Oakdale campus. It was a gloomy day and there were thunderstorms in the forecast. The weather helped convince me that leaving the barbeque I was enjoying on Independence Day, was not as upsetting as one would think. The path I was about to take was desolate, dark and uncharted. The people I would be joining were unfamiliar. The professors were ones I needed to listen to and learn from. My motivation was there and the determination to finish was rooted deep within.

I can remember sitting in class with the eight other professionals that would soon become my lifeline as the work became more difficult and the expectations increased. We each had the opportunity to share our metaphors, something that would soon become a pattern as I ventured into each new course. My first personal metaphor was a kaleidoscope. This choice was because I was someone who was in constant motion, evolving and changing to move with the pieces I collected along my journey. Each new piece of knowledge was represented by the colorful pieces of glass found inside the kaleidoscope and with the addition of earth warming sunlight and the guidance of hands to hold me as I turned and twisted, I would become a beautiful sight, a colorful picture of beauty.

The foundation of our program was established that first month. Two courses and two extremely wise individuals guided our discovery of theorists, encouraged to produce quality work and presented us with the quality of work they expected from us for the

next two years. Planned Change, taught by Dr. Dunlop was the perfect kickoff to the program. *Sustainable Leadership* by Hargreaves and Fink left me with a more global look at leadership, change and the qualities needed to implement and sustain the necessary improvements within my own building. In addition, Dr. Dunlop exposed us to a large number of theorists. This list has grown over the course of the program and a chart of the theorists can be found on my Scholar Page.

Our second class we met Dr. Smith. I was met with rigor and material that pretty much knocked me to my knees. Deborah Stone's *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* was the most difficult text I had been faced with. It was in the class and with my fellow cohort members that we dissected the intricacies of this literature. I was both mentally and physically exhausted when this class was completed, however I had in my hands my first attempt at a mini-dissertation. This BRI paper would serve as my baseline from which I would improve on with each new paper, written in APA format that would be required in many of my future courses. Dr. Smith had a way of challenging me that month to truly challenge my thinking and read literature for a new purpose and overcome obstacles by looking at it from all angles. Although frustrating at times, Dr. Smith would rarely answer a questions posed, but rather guide you to answering it yourself or ask more questions based on the information one would receive in the process.

When I began the next semester of classes, I was not sure what to expect. It was in this class, that I was able to regain my footing. Data, technology, and debate were just a few of the concepts that I was more familiar with. I establish myself as a "teacher" for many of my colleagues guiding them through some of the tasks we were asked to complete.

Using these first three classes and beginning to absorb what each of these professors shared with us, my kaleidoscope began to turn again. Telling a story with numbers taken from one of his many publications provided me with rich data and a venue to present it. The resources I had begun to collect and store for the creation of my digital portfolio were inspiring and served as the base on which I would continue to build. Driving home each Sunday after class provided me with an opportunity to truly reflect on the events, assignments, literature and discussions that would take place over the course of the weekend. Each Friday night I would return to the beautiful campus in Oakdale, making the right into the driveway with a nervous excitement about what new discoveries lay ahead.

Not having such a positive experience of the cohort model at a previous institution, I can honestly say, “St. John’s does it right.” The individuals I have spent the past two years and seven months with have become my doctoral family. They are quality people whom I admire and respect. I have learned from them and the experiences they have shared. I have worked with each of them in various capacities while completing a multitude of assignments.

Most importantly, I have grown as a leader, a professional, and a person in some many ways. I believe I am wiser and have been able to give more to my job and to my studies than ever before. During the program, another metaphor emerged. This metaphor can be found throughout my digital portfolio. While creating my digital portfolio, I came across a green themed template with a banker’s lamp. This lamp sits on my desk and serves as a constant reminder that I will finish. It also reminds me of the inner strength I have found over the past six years following the sudden passing of my father. An antique banker’s lamp was gift from a client of his when he was doing some work on

their house. He knew I had taken a liking to it because it had a special fanciness to it. I thought of it as a symbol of knowledge and sophistication. Seeing the lamp icon on each page as I built my portfolio and found inspiration in the accumulation of light and illuminating quotes, I have forged on, overcoming all obstacles in my way. As I completed each course, the light became brighter and shed light on my path, guiding me to my destination.

Although the kaleidoscope continues to turn and twist in the sun, I know the final picture will be one of beauty and awe. It will represent a collage of theory, literature, research, passion, hardships, and perseverance. It will also be worth every penny and every mile traveled. It will be amazing and it will be mine.