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CPPL100
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Semester One Reflection: "Expectations vs. Reality"

Background:

I graduated from high school a semester earlier than most students, since my school sponsors a post-graduation study abroad program in Israel. My friends and I went on this trip in late February expecting to stay until May. However, due to the increasing worries of coronavirus, we left in mid-March. Because of this, when I returned to America, I had an exceptional understanding of the disease and the fears surrounding its spread. I had a feeling that my first semester of college would be online and this suspicion was – for better or worse – correct.

I was able to mentally prepare myself for a semester online because I predicted the situation. Since I hadn't been in school since winter, I decided to take some summer classes at my local community college to get back in the gist of things. The two classes I took there taught me an incredible amount about pacing myself, how to handle online learning, and how to get the most out of the odd circumstances. I was so lucky to have that preparation going into my fall semester of freshman year. As a result, I feel like I've been able to get the most out of my UMD and Public Leadership experience thus far.

College, Generally:

In high school, I viewed college as a be-all-end-all: I would go to college, get my degree, and automatically be successful. Having almost completed my first semester, I've realized college is much more like High School: The Sequel. A college degree doesn't guarantee success, but it gives you the tools to pursue that success. Given that I'm not on campus and only experiencing the academic aspect of university, it seems eerily similar to my high school experience. There was no big change or tumultuous shift.

As I said earlier, I had a feeling that the coronavirus crisis would deeply impact college before most Americans even recognized the seriousness of the virus. I was able to prepare myself adequately. I have honestly been satisfied with the university's response, although I'm not on campus, so I can't speak too well about all aspects. I think all of my professors have done a great job adapting material and lessons to the non-traditional mediums used this semester. I wish I could have had a classic freshman year experience, but I enjoyed my online freshman year as well.

I think the course I had which made the most "revealing intellectual connections" was JOUR200. It was a basic introduction to journalism class, but it was so intellectually stimulating and interesting. The course revealed the connections between journalistic values (integrity, timeliness, relevance of reporting) and the history of journalism itself. The Public Leadership courses also did a good job of trying to tame "'wild' knowledge" into course material; both the PL classes combine Leadership Theory with real-life situations and hypothetical simulations.

Through this semester, I still keep in touch with my high school friends. I am also still extremely active in the Jewish community in my area. Even as I continue to make new connections and join new communities in college, I aim to remain informed and engaged in my previous connections.

Public Leadership:

To me, leadership means the ability to inspire and guide others when a situation calls for it; leaders are the ones to step up when it is necessary. Given my broad definition of leadership, my understanding of the category as a whole has not changed over the course of the semester. However, my studies in both CPPL100 and PLCY201 have given the different types and facets of leadership deep nuance. I now understand concepts like "citizen leadership" and I am able to better comprehend the risks and challenges that leaders must take in order to be successful.

I had no specific expectations regarding CPPL100 although I did have a general picture of what the class would be like. I did not expect the class to be so free; it wasn't a bad thing at all, but I definitely expected a little bit more structure to the class. The material we did discuss and read aligned pretty well with the nondescript expectations I had for the class.

The structure of CPPL100 was, as I said before, very free and thus very different from all of my other classes, which relied heavily on structure. The delivery of the class – the mix of reading, simulations, prompted discussions, and free discussions – was similar to all of my other courses. CPPL's true difference was in the grading of assignments. Most of my other courses had about a thousand points worth of assignments throughout the semester; CPPL had less than a hundred. This meant that each assignment in CPPL held a lot of weight. I liked how this made the class feel a bit less weighted material wise, but it was also stressful to have an empty grade book. I constantly found myself wondering, *am I doing something wrong because we're two-thirds through the semester and my grade is still marked as N/A in Canvas?* Overall, the approach to grading in CPPL held some intrinsic value but, personally, I didn't like it.

Moving Forward:

I am excited to see what second semester brings! You can read more about that here, in my Reflected Best Self Leadership Development Plan.