

Peter Brown

When did you start at Hamilton?
I was at Hamilton for 4th-6th grades from 1994-1997. I graduated from Wheeler in 2003.

What was life like before Hamilton?
I was at Moses Brown prior to coming to Hamilton. I don't recall the specifics, but I do remember that school was very frustrating and challenging. The outcome of my frustration was a lack of confidence. And it didn't make me very excited to show up at school each day.

What changed for you when you were at Hamilton?
I gained confidence. I have always said that Hamilton builds confidence. It might sound so simple that that was my biggest takeaway. But I went to Hamilton for three years and ultimately that is probably the most important thing that I left with. Today I have a lot of confidence. I really think if you have confidence, you can accomplish a lot.

And I learned perseverance. I learned to try hard and be comfortable failing. But, now looking back, I know if you feel that you're failing at everything, your skin can never be thick enough. I learned that if I try hard enough, I will find success somewhere.

At Hamilton and Wheeler, I learned that I had an identity that wasn't only "dyslexic kid." I had value for my strengths. For me, on the athletic field, I was equal. I was good at sports, so that was important. The other thing I remember is that math and science came to me very easily. I don't think I appreciated this until later, but it was important to have some parts of school going well. It was important to have things that did come easy when reading and writing didn't.

In hindsight, I know that the classes being smaller and everyone getting individual attention was really important. And the teaching dynamic was too. At Hamilton it never felt like the model of the teacher in front of a class, lecturing. And, of course, there weren't 15 or 20 students in the class. That worked for me.

What do you see as your dyslexic advantages?
Having been the one in the room who wasn't learning quickly, I am empathetic to how people might be struggling and what feels challenging to them. I work in a complicated financial

industry where things can be very complex and difficult to understand. If someone is struggling or makes a mistake, I feel like I can appreciate that and want to offer help.

I also think I build strong relationships. This came out of necessity, like in college, when I would go to a lecture. I would pay close attention and take notes, but I would leave and not feel like I knew what was going on. I learned to rely on connecting with people who did. So if I was confused about something, I could go to those classmates and talk to them. We could have a conversation to reinforce whatever was taught. I'm a fairly introverted person, so this wasn't always easy, but I figured out I needed to do this to learn.

And, I know myself and what my strengths are. When it would come to a group project, I would intentionally pick people who weren't like me. I wasn't going to be the guy writing the paper, so I needed to collaborate with someone who had that as their strength. So when putting together a team, I surround myself with people who are different from me.

What happened after Wheeler?
For undergrad, I went to Clemson University. It was a unique experience to go to such a big school and it was a challenge, but it was a chance to get a new identity. It was good to push myself out of the small environment where I was really comfortable. It definitely stretched me, but I knew that was what the real world was going to be like. I had to figure out how to learn and grow in that environment.

Classes of 300 people. It would have been easy to skip a class, but I didn't want to and I couldn't have. I had to go to class, and read the book, and watch the video, and take notes, and talk to a friend about it. Some of my friends could skip the lecture and just show up for the test. I knew I needed to digest the material in as many ways as possible.

What do you do professionally now?
I work at State Street Collective Investment Trust. I'm in institutional banking, which is big and complex. Yeah, it's banking and finance, but ultimately, it's people and leadership. I find it really fits my strengths as a dyslexic person. I get to think big picture, collaborate across a global organization. Those are things I can do well. I am not writing technical compliance requirements. That job will go to someone else who is very detail oriented and who can do that much better than I can.

What do you like to do when you're not working?
I spend a lot of time outside and with my two boys, Teddy is 6 and Cooper is 3. I was on the board of Wheeler for a couple of years, president of the Alumni Board for a little while. I served full terms of those things, but I chose to remain on the Hamilton Committee and stay engaged with Hamilton most specifically.

Any advice or insights for Hamilton students?
Things will get easier! In school, you don't have much flexibility. You'll get some choice in high school, but then you get a lot more in college and you get even more in your job. School is the

hardest. Even in a school like Hamilton and Wheeler, which gives choice and is flexible, school is always going to be a relatively small box to stay in compared to adult life.

Make your identity. A suggestion I have for students, or maybe it's advice to parents, have that other identity. Do ballet, play on an athletic team, do art. It's so important to be known for something besides being the kid who isn't a good reader or writer. You have a lot of advantages, some to do with your dyslexia and some that don't. Find what you do well.