**Analytic Personal and Professional Essay**

*Since Portfolio Evaluation II, in what ways have you continued to be engaged in your professional community?*

Since Portfolio II, I have made a conscious effort to stay engaged in my professional community. I’ve attended two additional conferences and volunteered my services.

For a second year, I’ve attended the Virginia Council for Learning Disability at James Madison University. This is a conference that typically caters to the needs of practitioners. Within the conference, I attended several sessions and assisted in running a table with my colleagues.

Recently, I attended the Council for Exceptional Children in Boston. At this conference, I had the opportunity to co- present with Dr. Graff and Dr. Berkeley. While at the conference, I attended several sessions about reading, technology, and inclusion. Also, I had an opportunity to attend a CLD meeting. In this meeting, I witnessed leaders in the field of LD discussing prominent issues. Taking the advice from my committee chair, I met with one of my colleagues and spent a few hours with her networking with professionals in my community. To gain even further experience, I presented in a CLD conference in Baltimore and a CEC conference in Tampa.

With volunteering my services, I have had the opportunity to review manuscripts for publication with support from Dr. Berkeley. Dr. Berkeley allowed me to write my comments and recommendations from reading the journal. Dr. Berkeley would then meet with me and model how using the quality indictors was a method to determine the total quality of a journal.

I continue to have the opportunity to conduct research with Dr. Berkeley. We meet on a consistent basis where she explains her critical thinking for her processes and next steps. Dr. Berkeley consistently models her thinking and then allows me to practice what she models when conducting research. This process has given me a deeper understanding of how to conduct research.

This summer (2018), I have had the opportunity to work with Dr. Francis and Duke on a qualitative manuscript about students with disabilities and their college experience. I gained valuable exposure in effectively coding qualitative research from individual interviews. The processes I learned from this experience will help guide my research for my area of interest.

*How have you addressed the gaps addressed in Portfolio Evaluation 2?*

Academic writing and narrowing down a topic of research interest are two gaps identified in portfolio 2. To address my academic writing, I continue to seek out different opportunities to become involved in my professional field. With guidance from Dr. Berkeley and Dr. Graff, I have submitted proposals for CEC and CLD. Second, with the approval of my committee, I have enrolled in a [writing course](../Writing%20Class2/Writing%20Class/Weekly%20Journal_Fall2017_Writing.docx) to specifically address this issue. The writing course has given me a greater understanding of academic writing and how to approach the nuances that come with academic writing. For example, we are all assigned a partner in class. With our partner, we review each other’s writing assignment weekly. By reviewing my colleagues writing and providing critical feedback, it helps me understand my own writing. Working with Dr. Berkeley, I continue to seek out opportunities to focus on publications.

While meeting with Dr. Berkeley, I was able to use this time to critically explore my areas of interest. During this period, I began to hone down my topic to focus on a portfolio 3 literature review. After a full year and several reiterations of my literature review, I have created a product that emphasis my area of interest. Within this reiteration period, I enrolled in an advanced qualitative course to discover if qualitative research was an avenue that could help me gain a better understand of my research interest. Simultaneously, I was working with working with Dr. Francis with qualitative research. I was able to filter my qualitative research methods with Dr. Francis. This strategy provided me with a deeper understanding of how I could research my area of interest.

*What have you done and how have the courses informed you? Provide evidence of these changes through your coursework products and assignments with hyperlinks to course products including the assignments you were given to complete, as appropriate.*

As stated at the end of Portfolio II, I am interested in understanding systemic change and what role school leaders play in the adoption of a schoolwide reading program in middle school. Specially, how does this adoption impact students with learning disabilities. My coursework has become very specific and pinpointed to understand systemic change, students with LD, and educational leadership.

In EDUC 897: Independent Study PhD in Educ I had the opportunity to conduct an independent study on the research to practice gap in special education focusing on targeted reading instruction. In my annotated BIP, research to practice gap I reviewed a multitude of articles. The field was diligent in identifying evidence-based practices ( EBPs) to address the gap. What I discovered was that the field was successful in identifying what were the best EBPs for reading. However, the field had more difficulty in the implementation of the practices in a school. Generally, researchers know what to implement to assist in reading support, but they lack the knowledge and structure in the how to implement the practice.

As a graduate assistant for Dr. Berkeley and Dr. Graff, I’ve had the opportunity to apply research to practice. In EDRS 823: Adv Res Single Subj/Case, I wrote a paper, [Reading Research for Students with ID: Effective Curriculum and Outcomes](../../GMU_courses/EDRS%20823-Fall.2016/Finalpaper_823_fall_2016/Final%20paper_832_fall2016/Final%20paper%20and%20documents/EDRS823_final_paper_Jason_sutton.docx) describing a study that I participated in with Mason LIFE. The purpose of this study was to investigate the achievability and effectiveness of a computer-based repeated reading program, Read Naturally (RN). RN was used as a reading fluency intervention for post-secondary students with intellectual disabilities. Overall, this experience exposed me to the pitfalls that can occur when conducting research. With working with adults, no one day looks like another when you have to consider factors of personality, behavior, and life events that impact the learning. Personally, I had to apply my research knowledge and systematically think through the choices that I made with the research. Consequently, I learn from some of the choices that I made. Specifically, I learned the lesson of communicating effectively with your team to ensure your implementing the research with fidelity.

My internship, in [EDUC 890: Prog Eval SpED Reading Init.,](../../GA%20Work%20Mason/GA,%20work%20study,%20internships.conferences/Internship_PactPlus/Action%20Plan%20Pac%20Plus_Final_12.7.16_Final.docx) was an application of my prior knowledge, GA responsibilities, and knowledge from my coursework. This internship became a pivotal moment in finding a clear direction with my research interest. With the guidance of Dr. Berkeley, I had an opportunity to internship in a reading initiative called Pact Plus led by Dr. Wexler. The purpose of my internship was to understand the barriers school leaders encounter when implementing a schoolwide initiative. I interviewed school leaders and conducted a focus group with teachers to collect a wide spectrum of perspectives about school leaders and implementing a schoolwide initiative. I also attended weekly coaches meeting led by the pact plus instructors. This also included me shadowing a pact plus coach to observe how their professional development being taught by the coaches were transferred into the classroom. Maneuvering in the school to accomplish the internship required me building relationships with school leaders, teachers, and the pact plus individuals. In conclusion, it was a great example of what research says is the best practice to adopt schoolwide initiatives does not always translate into practice.

With the clarity I was experiencing from my internship, EDRS 822, assisted me in understanding how I was going to collect research on my interest. I was interested in understanding the perceptions of teachers and school leaders with their ability to implement new schoolwide initiatives. In this class, I gained knowledge about my phenomenon and what would be the best method to research my interest. The class assignments were based around [theory and philosophy](../../GMU_courses/EDRS822-Spring%202018/Module1/Sutton%20M1.docx), [design and methods](../../GMU_courses/EDRS822-Spring%202018/Module2/Sutton%20M2.docx), and [quality of your design](../../GMU_courses/EDRS822-Spring%202018/Module3/Sutton%20M3.docx) on my area of interest. This is when I really began to think about my research interest and how systemic change was considered with new schoolwide initiatives. This coursework and previous experiences in the program led me, with Dr. Berkeley’s direction, to my knowledge evidence paper about school leadership and systemic change.

*How have your courses influenced your thinking and work?*

My coursework has had a profound impact on my thinking and work. With my thinking, I find myself taking more time to analyze what I am trying to research. I want to gain a deeper understanding of how this is important to the field and what contribution it will make. I think about how I will address and identify problems. I consistently try to identify theories, if any, that will help me analyze a problem with deeper context. I can step back with my research with less passion and more substance. In the beginning of the program, I found myself writing about issues that I was passionate about. I still think this is the right path to walk on but support my issues with research and let the research display my passion. With the growing confidence, of my thinking, in the world of academia, I also find myself more comfortable in conferences, around my colleagues, and professors in the building. In whatever setting I find myself, I can have a conversation and follow the conversation, even at times adding input. The same approach also helps me with my work. I constantly find myself trying to make my work clear, concise, and important to the field. With a holistic understanding, I have concluded that my personal knowledge, acquired with life experiences, was only a slither of my knowledge. The more academic research I did in the program, the more I came to realize that my known knowledge was limited. Meaning, the more one seems to understand a phenomenon, the more they realize that they understand nothing.