**Section 2: Analytical personal and Professional Update**

**Since Portfolio 1, in what ways have you been engaged in your professional community?**

After completing portfolio one, I knew that I had to get involved in my professional community to realize the complexities, politics, and issues in the field. My area of interest was reading comprehension for student with learning disabilities (LD). My first step was to meet with my committee chair and ask for guidance. After meeting with my committee chair, I had a plan on how I would strategically engage with my professional community. My committee chair helped me developed strategic steps that would guidance me in my goal of professional engagement.

I sent a proposal to the Virginia Council for Learning Disabilities (VCLD). I had the opportunity to present a poster presentation about finding evidence-based reading programs. This fall, with colleagues, we presented at the Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD) about Response to Intervention (RTI). This year, I attended the American Evaluation Association (AEA) and American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference. The involvement in my professional community aided in understanding the complexities of my interest in reading with LD students in public education.

Additionally, as a graduate assistant, I have had opportunity to work with Dr. Graff and Dr. Berkeley with implementing a reading program with post-secondary students with intellectual disabilities (ID). Not only does this connect me with individuals in my professional community, I am having a direct impact with students and also gaining practical experience with my area of focus.

**How have you addressed the gaps discussed in Portfolio Evaluation 1?**

At the end of portfolio one, my committee identified several gaps that need to be addressed. My committee stressed the importance of getting involved in my community. They proposed I attend and present in professional conferences. As previously noted, I am continuously addressing this recommendation.

My committee told me to be aware that my assignments, including presentations, should be in APA format. Likewise, I was instructed to revise my curriculum vitae. I attend a meeting, led by my committee chair, on structuring your vitae. A recommendation was made to take part in a co-teaching experience to further explore the possibility of teaching in higher education. In the Spring of 2016, I co-taught a class with Dr. Rioux-Baily. It was a great experience, but it did not a final bearing on my interest in higher education.

**What have you done and how have the course informed you?**

As said in the beginning of this update, my area of focus has been seeking to understand reading comprehension in middle school for LD students. My coursework is pinpointing my focus in reading.

EDSE 841: Intervention in Special Education I was required to produce a meta-analysis. I wanted to investigate what types of reading comprehension interventions were being implemented in middle school for LD students. I was interested in analyzing the specific measures and how they are being incorporated into the intervention. I wanted to understand the influence individual measures had on reading comprehension interventions. The results of my paper, gave me a better understanding of the types of reading comprehension that were developed and practiced in school. I also discovered that researchers who embedded metacognition skills in their intervention had a greater impact on student achievement in reading.

In taking EDUC 874: The Achievement Gap, I used this opportunity to research the gap in reading between students with learning disabilities and their non-disabled peers. Specifically, I was interested in analyzing in what ways are current trends and policies affecting the achievement gap in reading between LD students and their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, after researching our topic, we had to make a recommendation on how to close the gap. In this class, I decided to use self-regulation as a recommendation to narrow the gap. With having the flexibility to take a broader approach to this topic, I started to see the impact that policies were having on creating the achievement gap in reading with LD students. The two classes made me step back and look at reading with a wider lens.

EDRS 820: Evaluation Methods for Educational Programs and Curricula was my introduction to program evaluation and designs. This class explored the types of current systems and models for evaluating educational programs. A requirement for the class was to create a program evaluation plan. The coursework had a focus on knowing the desires of your client, instead of researching a specific concern or issue. What I took away from this course was the influence that the changing behavioral variables of clients, politics, and relationships can have on an evaluation. This course opened my eyes to see the potential benefit I could have with evaluations and reading programs in schools. At the end of this class, I knew I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of program evaluation and design.

In the same semester, I had an opportunity to take part in a co-teaching experience. I co-taught EDSE 629: Secondary Curriculum and Strategies for Students with Disabilities to Access the General Curriculum. In this class, I had the opportunity to be the lead instructor in three of the classes. The conclusion of my experience was the value of exposing practicing teachers to evidence-based practice and developing opportunities for them to incorporate these practices into their own classroom. I also realized the disconnect of using evidence-based practices compared to teacher practices in the delivery of classroom instruction.

EDSE 844: Current Issues in Special Education gave me the opportunity to see how issues in special education are being discussed. This course involved researching historical aspects of special education and how it is shaping our current issues. I also studied what reading comprehension practices are being researched in middle schools. This course exposed current challenges, moving forward in the field (e.g., co-teaching, dyslexia, LD students, reading, etc.…).

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

The courses have changed my thinking. With my thinking, the coursework has cultivated the habit of thought. The coursework has equipped me with a systematic lens to look at problems as subsets of a bigger issue allowing me to become a critical thinker. With my work, the tools that you acquire give you the competency to make connections and discover workable solutions to research questions. In the area of reading, I am beginning to understand the historical concepts of public education and how it impacts reading with LD students. My work is shifting from investigating reading comprehension strategies in a school to unfolding the systems and designs that impact reading in a school. Research allows me to systematically research a problem and show researched- based solutions. Consequently, my thinking has become more critical the longer I remain exposed to the problem.

**What are your intellectual goals now?**

I have four targeted concrete intellectual goals. Goal one is to focus on academic writing. I want to continue to be involved in writing opportunities. I will work with my committee chair with my writing. Along with my academic writing, goal two is to work on presenting in academic settings using academic vocabulary. Goal three includes increasing my knowledge base in the field by reading relevant research in special education and program evaluation. Goal four is aligning myself with individuals who share the same interest and learn from their mentorship. When possible, I will attend conferences and professional development opportunities to support this growth.

**What are your professional goals now? Provide evidence of these changes.**

As I continue to refine my intellectual goals, it has shifted my professional goals. I am still not clear if I have a desire to work in the field of higher education. Nevertheless, with the introduction of program evaluation, I see commonalities on how I can help serve the field of education in an academic or consulting setting. With my interest in program evaluation, I have joined the Washington Evaluation Chapter in Washington, D.C.

More importantly, I want my professional goals to lead me to a purpose where I can serve kids in a space where I can be used to help ensure that ALL students are given the opportunity to receive an equitable education with equitable practices. Moving forward in this program, I am beginning to see the pieces (coursework) connect. It is vital, that I continue to listen to my committee members and never turn down opportunities that are presented. Every opportunity I have encountered, has shifted my perspective in my learning process and brings me a step closer to clarity, in realizing my purpose.