

POPS: Plenty Of Personal Strengths

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Throughout my childhood I believed that learning could only come from the droning voices of teachers echoing off the cold, brick walls of a classroom. I would sit in class after class because I was supposed to master concepts, to pass the test, to pass the class, to get into college and “get a job”. It was repetitive and boring, and while I was supposed to be following the steps to graduation, I spent most of my days carefully counting seconds until the final bell. I was a college freshman studying music education; a bright-eyed 18-year-old future teacher, who didn’t realize how my education could grow once I left the windowless classroom.

In my music education classes, I read all about the skills required to be a successful choral teacher, but reading about how to properly run a choral program was like eating dried out day-old bread, instead of tasting that freshly baked warmth. Sure, it gave me an idea of what the “real world” was like, but it just couldn’t compare. In fact, I could easily argue that I have learned just as much outside the classroom as I have inside of it. Students with unparalleled ambition and organizational skills can make unimaginable things happen at a relatively small university.

I began my out-of-class exploration when approached by several of my upperclassmen peers who were on a strict mission to recruit freshman for their student organizations. Not knowing what I was getting myself into, I signed up for something called American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) with the one or two new friends I had met from my classes. Little did I know, these weekly meetings would blossom into many priceless opportunities.

Four years later, I found myself the President of our collegiate chapter of the American Choral Directors Association, and using my own ambition, I accomplished one

of my proudest moments. I lead my organization, nearly single-handedly, to present a memorial Pops Concert that raised over \$2000 for a music scholarship in honor of a dear friend. Through this completely volunteer and extra-curricular experience, I was able to get a good taste of a liberal arts education and apply my textbooks to real life.

According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities' list of essential outcomes, a liberal arts education helps students to prepare for a modern world in several ways, three of which I found to be easily applied to my own education and the concert.

The first is intellectual and practical skills, specifically communication, creative thinking, teamwork and problem solving. In being part of multiple student organizations, I am faced with making use of those practical skills on a daily basis. The Pops Concert is only one example of using skills learned in the classroom and applying them to the real world. The idea for the concert came to me from one of the members of the organization after an alumna of our group was killed in a car accident. In lieu of flowers, the family was asking for donations towards a music scholarship that would be created in her name. Our organization decided to take a creative twist and donate the proceeds of our annual Pops Concert to her fund instead.

In order for the event to be successful, I was required to communicate with my advisor, my treasurer, the scholarship foundation, the press, my peers and the community. I used my fellow members as a bouncing board for ideas, and together we helped build a scholarship that will serve students for years to come. Since I was able to run this concert, I now have practical experience using teamwork, successful communication and creative thinking in the context of a concert. Without that

experience, I could not have told future employers that I have experience with those skills in a context that fits the job description.

The second of the essential outcomes is personal and social responsibility, which particularly includes ethical reasoning and action, and lifelong learning.

As the President, I was in charge of everything, and frankly, I was in over my head. The most challenging piece of the puzzle was the auditions. There were enough auditions to fill almost 3 hours of music, and it was my job to choose between my peers who were emotionally invested in the cause, and peers who were more entertaining performers. No classroom can equip you for an ethical situation like that. I made some challenging decisions and had to weigh in people's emotions. It was difficult to weigh those options and I didn't feel qualified to choose. Lucky for me, my peers are mature enough to handle it. I can only hope that if I teach high school, those students will be half as kind.

Since it was a memorial concert, there were many ethical choices to be made. Many of the decisions surrounding the concert had to be weighed in on by the girl's parents to ensure that everyone was satisfied and not offended. This took great responsibility on my part, and a whole lot of communication. I now have the skills to handle even the toughest of concert situations.

The third and final outcome is integrative and applied learning, particularly the demonstration of new skills being applied to the real world. The Pops Concert is one of my proudest moments, and a crystal clear example of the application of my new skills to the real world.

My responsibilities for that concert were innumerable, but somehow I pulled myself up by the bootstraps and made it through with graceful bow. The skills I gained in that extra-curricular experience have granted me the opportunity to spring forward with a new outlook on my future. This experience is only one of the many I have been afforded during my college career. As the President of the American Choral Directors Association, I go out of my way to bring opportunities to my fellow peers that we cannot receive in a classroom. I also try my best to expand upon the skills and knowledge we obtain in a classroom. Since the concert, we have sung with the Very Specials Arts choir, a group of special-needs adults; planned a trip to Madison for our regional conference; sung Christmas carols at a nursing home and sponsored guest speakers.

As a future educator, I know that there is limited time in a school year, and so much of my students' learning must occur outside of the classroom. My own out-of-class experiences have grown my education equally as much as those within those once confining walls. I am no longer a bright-eyed freshman trying to get through each day, but have blossomed into an educator who will share the values of one's experiences outside a classroom with students for generations to come.

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