

Looking Back: Reflections on Life as a Doctoral Student

Alexis Harvey

Jeff Christensen is a third year doctoral student in the School Psychology and Counselor Education program and proudly hails from Portland, Oregon. Coming across the country to complete his education was an intentional choice as Jeff wanted to experience life on the other side of the country and to expose himself to different ways of thinking. Coming from the “left coast” allows Jeff to see things in a different context and to think outside of the box. Jeff has taken his positive West Coast attitude toward life and applied it to his William & Mary experience as a member of the Graduate Education Association and as a peer editor for *The William & Mary Educational Review*. Jeff has been a presence at the School of Education as he enjoys a good reputation among both students and faculty for his work ethic and sense of humor.

Presently, Jeff is preparing for his doctoral dissertation in Counselor Education. His study concerns the ability of counselors to self-assess in order to be more effective counselors and also to be more knowledgeable about their own needs. In order to facilitate self-assessment, Jeff hopes to ultimately craft an instrument that will allow counselors to establish their technical competency, as well as their dispositional traits as a counselor particularly their ability to demonstrate empathy for clients. Jeff immediately ran into a road block upon setting out to complete his research since there is little extant research on the dispositional characteristics of counselors. However, Jeff was not put off by this development and decided to approach the challenge with determination and a positive attitude. In an effort to remain true to his aspirations and to “go big” he switched the emphasis from creating the instrument to focusing on current literature and national policies of accredited agencies to develop the groundwork and justification for creating the instrument in the future. Jeff believes that the information presented in his dissertation can be used in the future to create a Delphi analysis that could then be used as a basis to form the instrument.



Jeff’s plans after graduation are no less ambitious than his dissertation study. He hopes to become a member of the academic community in Counselor Education for which he has a passion. He believes in concentrating on counselors as not only the conduit of helping others, but as individuals who themselves want assistance in becoming better practitioners or as he puts it: “...helping the helpers get help”. Jeff hopes that he, as a member of the academic community will be able to instill in prospective counselors a can-do attitude, knowledge that there is more than just technical skills involved in counseling clients, and openness to showing their own personality to clients so that “counselors are seen themselves as people first and therapists second”. Jeff hopes that these qualities will allow counselors to “... be a person that also does therapy”. He believes that a counselor who is a person first and a therapist second, can build trusting relationships with clients which will then allow for positive therapy to occur.

Upon graduation, Jeff hopes to take what he has learned both academically and personally back with him to Portland. No small part of what he will take with him will be his WM experience as he had not previously lived away from his family and familiar surroundings. Jeff has found the WM community supportive and welcoming which has eased the transition. He has watched himself grow

as both a person and a professional during his time at William & Mary. Jeff is driven by his passion for helping others and for helping the helpers.

Jeff's positive attitude, openness, and willingness to step away from the familiar have made him a respected figure in the School of Education. In his remaining time at William & Mary, he hopes to continue to work with school organizations to encourage more collaboration and cross-over between programs of study within the School of Education as a community of helping professions. Jeff sees both challenges and opportunities for students to grow and flourish at WM. Jeff has watched himself grow as both a person and as a professional during his time at WM. With his passion and desire to go big intact, Jeff looks forward to becoming the first person with a doctorate in his family. It is the vision of being surrounded by family and friends at graduation and a passion that inspires Jeff and for his chosen profession that will allow him to continue to think big.

About the author

Alexis Harvey is a PhD candidate in the Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership program, focusing on K-12 Administration.