

Jeremy Gillentine

COUC860—Leadership and Advocacy Reflection Paper

Due: March 9, 2025

### **Leadership and Advocacy Reflection Paper**

Here are some general thoughts regarding our intensive week that met in the Liberty Mountain Conference Center located on Liberty University's campus in Lynchburg, Virginia. One area where I gained insight was with leadership as modeled by Dr. Deacon (i.e., Dr. D is still learning and adapting and submitting to leadership). During our discussions, Dr. D passively mentioned that each intensive week is a little different. Dr. D said she continues to learn generally but also learns from her students each intensive and then will implement these things learned with her future students. This helped me to see that even though Dr. D has been a counselor educator for many years and is very knowledgeable about the subjects she teaches; she is still seeking to grow and to actively implement the information to help her students grow. I will need to be intentional not to become stagnant by seeking to grow and to implement things I will learn that can help my students be well equipped to move into their roles as counselors and/or counselor educators.

The other area mentioned above is remaining submissive to those who are in roles of leadership above me. Dr. D mentioned that when things occur that could have implications for the CES program or Liberty University, she will seek advice or guidance from her superiors. Dr. D has been involved in leadership roles and was a key tool to help gain CACREP approval for multiple programs at Liberty University. Dr. D could easily make a case that she has the knowledge and skills to make these type decisions unilaterally yet still chooses to seek the

guidance from those in leadership roles. One additional aspect of interests here is the person who is Dr. D's direct superior (Dr. Kristy Ford) is a former student of Dr. D. This helps me to think about seeing this dynamic as a true honor rather than having feelings of resentment as some may have when this occurs. This is an honor because Dr. D has been allowed to see a person she has helped to train rise to become skilled enough and distinguished enough to be promoted into leadership at Liberty.

I learned that Dr. Deacon sees advocacy from a stance of what can I impact now. From what I understood from class, Dr. D leans towards the micro level rather than the macro level of advocacy. When meeting with people and hearing the issues they are dealing with, some issues can be affected by advocacy where I will be able to see the results of what I try to accomplish or overcome on behalf of my client, student, advisee, or staff. On the other hand, there are much larger issues that seem more set in stone and are very difficult to overcome and even may seem impossible to change. Dr. D shared the idea that there are certain interactions that I cannot change because it has already been decided (e.g., CACREP). I do not personally align with these ideals. I shared with Dr. D that when an issue seems immovable, my construction background has taught me to simply get a bigger hammer or piece of equipment that can move the obstruction. Dr. D said this may be the case, but to also be aware when you may be wearing yourself out banging a hammer against an issue the hammer will never change. I will defer to Mount Rushmore to demonstrate the need to learn where to apply the appropriate force to sculpt and develop the desired change.

I gave the example of Mr. Luther King and the fact that they could not change anything because racism and rampant stupidity were so ingrained in the culture and in essence had their foot on the necks of blacks and other minority people groups. However, MLK and that

movement did indeed move the immovable. I think the intended message was to pick our battles. I had a private discussion with Dr. D where I shared that I perceived her trying to say what my wife has often said to me about higher education. My wife says, “it does not matter if you like it or not because you are playing someone else’s game.” There are times when I may be able to help clients or students to overcome an issue they are being affected by where other times, the short answer will be to help them to meet the specifications of the issue (good or bad, like it or not) to be able to move on. I can accept this as a short-term solution, but if it is an issue that will repeatedly hinder or cause others unneeded stress or distress, steps need to be taken to help modify the issue even if it may require great effort.

Dr. D modeled that sometimes in leadership there may not be a clearcut answer to a dilemma. This was shown through Dr. D getting sick yet still deciding to move forward with class on Wednesday. This led to many different emotions from students. Through this issue and the discussions that spawned as a result helped me to consider what I would do in such a situation. I have the privilege of hindsight in my thoughts, but I would like to believe that as soon as I tested positive, I would have sent out emails or made phone calls to let students know what had occurred and the new arrangements to meet the requirement for the class. Dr. D gave the perspective that the “horse had already been let out of the barn” by our being together Monday and Tuesday.

Dr. D said she was improving by Wednesday morning when she came in and let us know she had been tested and received a positive COVID test. This may have been the case, but from the outside in, she had mild cold symptoms on Monday and Tuesday, but Wednesday morning seemed quite ill. By Wednesday afternoon, Dr. D did seem to have improved greatly. Dr. D said she never felt like she was dealing with brain fog, but that is not what it seemed like to the

audience (Wednesday morning). Though not an exact illustration, here is my general concept of what happened. Imagine you find you have been in a house for two days that has mold issues but did not realize this until day three. Would you say, well, I have been here two days, what is done is done, I may as well just stay here. I do not think this would be our answer. What if I as an individual student came in Wednesday and said, oh by the way, I had a positive COVID test last night but it is no big deal. In hind-sight, when I take in to consideration that my wife was in Lynchburg with me who has autoimmune issues, I should have gotten up and left the class room Wednesday morning to limit my continued exposure in a room where even if socially distanced, the AC would have been spreading the germs round and round the building, much less the room with the closed door.

I am under the impression that this week was required to be on campus because of CACREP requirements. Other than meeting that requirement, I see no reason this week should not be online. I would estimate there were 15 people in the class this week. Based on my travel expenses of approximately \$1,000 (I drove 10 hours and stayed in the Sleep Inn), I would say at a minimum that \$15,000 was spent for the class to be present in Lynchburg, VA this week. I see little added value for the investment as compared to an online experience. Had this class been online, the COVID diagnosis would have been a non-issue (assuming Dr. D was able to continue as she did this week). This may be a great illustration of a standard that must be met and therefore followed, but long term, could be changed through advocacy for and by students.

Though a bit awkward because of a positive COVID diagnosis, Dr. D modeled a way to handle when it is apparent that a student has been put-off by what has occurred. Dr. D went to the individuals and tried to make it right to the best of her ability. I know she did this with myself and at least one other student. When there are issues between individuals, it is often left

unaddressed. It seems to be the case that this is especially the case when there is a power differential. Even though Dr. D could have simply ignored our concerns, she chose to come to us individually to gain insights and varying perspectives to attempt to help bring unity and remove any potential distress that may have been present.