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FILA 450 Reflective Essay

Introduction

When I applied to Bridgewater in 2016, it was not my first choice of where to receive my college education. At the time, JMU and Liberty were my first two choices, and Bridgewater and the University of Delaware were potential backup options. When I took a tour of James Maddison, my parents encouraged me to take a tour of Bridgewater since it was in such proximity. I immediately discovered that I felt much more drawn to the small school setting of Bridgewater more than my two larger first choices. Both of my parents and several other family members are BC alumni, and were able to attest to the hands-on experience I could expect and the personal relationships I would develop. Something else Bridgewater offered was being affiliated with the Church of the Brethren. In Sussex County, Delaware I grew up attending a Brethren church regularly. At Bridgewater I had the opportunity to participate in Brethren church travel teams, Roundtable, Brethren Student Movement, and other Brethren-specific events or organizations. These opportunities were not high priorities when I was applying for colleges. Now that I am graduating, I am very grateful for these experiences and can’t imagine going to a different college where they are not offered. Many other aspects of my education at Bridgewater have had the same significance of not being what I expected, for better or worse. Bridgewater’s commitment to creating well-rounded graduates through a liberal arts education has provided many opportunities for learning outside my major that I could not have anticipated as an incoming freshman. My personal thoughts and opinions have developed both professionally and in how I view myself as an active member of a deeper community. Through classes at Bridgewater I have been exposed to deeper ethical thinking, diverse perspectives, public discourse, and other concepts that I was not considering before my college education. I have grown as both a learner and member of society and in many ways have much more room for growth. Before receiving my college education, I believe my major beliefs I felt strongly of were mostly on things in my life that directly impacted me, and less about how I fit in with a larger network of people. I believe my time at Bridgewater instilled more awareness and prepared me to continue reflecting on these aspects of my personal and professional life in the future.

Integration, Experiential Learning and Personalized Educational Program

[Essay Supporting Items](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/jlayton/essay-supporting-item-integration-experiential-learning-and-personalized-educational-program/)

I am a music major with PreK-12 Educational certification. My desired career when I got to Bridgewater was teaching band in a high school setting. To become certified for music education in Virginia, students must major in music and take additional education classes. The music major involves choosing a major instrument, taking private lessons, and giving two public recitals in addition to normal coursework. The education certification includes four different field experiences in addition to student teaching. Because of BC curriculum, I have now taken both education and music-specific education classes that focus on teaching music at all grade-levels. Additionally, I have also had field experiences at the elementary, middle, and secondary grade levels. Because of these opportunities both in and beyond the classroom, I now feel I am a much more well-rounded teacher candidate than I would have been if I had not gotten to complete Bridgewater’s education curriculum. As I prepare to embark on my personal job search, I feel confident not only that I am certified to accept any music teaching position, but that I would be an effective teacher at any level. I believe my areas of expertise have greatly expanded as a result of the broadening of my professional focus. One of my favorite music classes was Intro to Elementary Music Education, which I took in the fall of my senior year. The final project of the class was to design a three-lesson curriculum for elementary music class. The curriculum project included a proposal to the professor on how to design the curriculum. During this assignment, I had the opportunity to determine what I believed would engage students at the elementary level in the general music setting. By this time, I had written another paper in my Ethics and Identity class with Dr. Yordy in which I researched why certain students of certain backgrounds were uninterested in music programs in schools. Using some of the background information I gathered while writing that paper, I decided that my elementary curriculum would use popular music to teach musical concepts in accordance with Virginia music Standards of learning. I wrote three different lesson plans to accompany my curriculum rationale and included a summative assessment that would target the areas of my students’ learning that I wanted to be able to measure their growth. The skills I used to design this curriculum unit are skills that I have been using daily in my student teaching placement at Buffalo Gap High School. I am currently teaching a guitar class in which certain students are having trouble connecting with the material from the class’s method book-based curriculum. In order to bolster these students’ eagerness to learn, my cooperating teacher and I are in the process of gathering new ideas and possible approaches to enrich their learning. This has included using online resources that teach guitar parts to popular songs. It has been exciting to see that the same tools I gained from my music education curriculum project are tools I will use routinely in my professional teaching career.

Another opportunity to grow professionally at Bridgewater outside of normal coursework was my attendance at the Virginia Music Educator’s Association conference in the fall of each of my four years. At the conference, teachers and collegiate members have the opportunity to attend seminars and workshops that highlight many different areas of music education. In my sophomore year, I wrote a reflection on the concert program for the 2017 collegiate recital. The recital takes place at the conference every year and consist of performances by collegiate members of VMEA. In my reflection, I discussed the highlights of several performances by students from many different schools affiliated with VMEA. The reflection involved the analysis of several of the pieces that were performed using terminology and viewpoints that were presented in my Music History class. I wrote about style, interaction between melody and harmony, tempo, color, and other musical and expressive elements. As a music teacher, it will be my job to assess areas of musicality that my students or ensembles have room to improve. I will also need to know how to devise a plan for specific improvement and how to execute that plan using the skills I have acquired in my education. I am already using these skills in my student teaching placement. Currently, I am working with concert band to prepare assessment music. This process involves monitoring progress in daily rehearsal and determining where the ensemble needs extra support and attention musically. A challenge so far in my placement has been providing enough meaningful feedback and commentary that gives clear direction for improvement. Recently, my cooperating teacher has praised my efforts and indicated that my work with the concert band has yielded measurable progress. I feel very fortunate that my experiences at the VMEA conference and in my classes have done such an excellent job of providing me plenty of opportunities to prepare myself for a teaching career.

After the conference in 2017, I became president of Bridgewater’s chapter of the National Association for Music Educators. My duties included coordinating Bridgewater’s trip to conference each year, scheduling meetings, and working professors and teachers in the area to provide professional development outings for our chapter. I believe my service has been another example of an opportunity to receive more preparation for my career beyond the classroom, and something I may not have gotten the chance to do at another school. I believe I can expect to engage in many similar logistical duties in my career as I did while I held the position of NAfME president. I also believe that I will be able to use skills acquired from various sessions and meetings in the same way that I will use what I have learned from BC classes.

Engage Diverse Perspectives

[Essay Supporting Item](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/jlayton/essay-supporting-item-engage-diverse-perspectives/)

In my freshman year, I arrived at Bridgewater as a member of the Flory Honors program. I am no longer a member of the program for a few reasons. One reason was my failure to initially achieve a 3.5 minimum GPA. My GPA has since rebounded quite nicely since my first few semesters. Another reason is that the course requirements of the honors programs do not line up completely with the music major pathway. The honors program requires that the student take seven honors courses during their four-year undergraduate degree. None of the honors courses that Bridgewater offers are music courses. The college does, however, address these issues and conflicts with other majors by allowing students to upgrade any course to an honor equivalent. The college also has a lenient one-year probation period for students who fail to achieve the minimum GPA requirement. Because of these accommodations by the program, I believe I may have been able to stay in the program if I had been more proactive in making a second effort to get off probation after my first semester. I do not believe, however, that my departure from the program has negatively impacted my career pursuit or preparedness. I am grateful for the opportunity to have attempted membership in the program. The only honors class I got to take was my PDP class in the fall of my freshman year entitled “The Spinning Truth.” During this class, I was encouraged to view media portrayals of politics and currents events using multiple perspectives. It was interesting to take this class during the 2016 presidential election. Before college, I would not have considered myself a politically active person in the sense that I do not hold political values in high regards with my other personal beliefs. After taking this course, I still don’t consider myself to be substantially politically aware, but I recognize the value of considering multiple perspectives. I also believe I now have a better understanding of where I stand personally on certain political issues, wherever they are applicable to my personal wellbeing and the wellbeing on my colleagues and fellow citizens. A major assignment that I completed in my PDP class was an essay examining the multiple opinions of Americans towards the United States occupation of and war with Iraq in the 2000s. In my paper I analyzed common arguments supporting and defending United States’ Iraq campaign. The assignment not only shed light on an issue that I was not previously well-versed on, but allowed me to experience the importance of seeing multiple sides to every scenario and being able to respect people’s viewpoints. I believe this will be absolutely crucial in working with students to determine the best approach to facilitating their learning and development. As an educator I will need to be able to recognize multiple different types of learners and outlooks on learning.

Public Discourse: Citizenship & Community Responsibility

[Essay Supporting Item](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/jlayton/essay-supporting-item-public-discourse-citizenship-community-responsibility/)

In the Spring of my junior year I took Classroom Management, a major course in the BC education pathway. The course involved a 20-hour field experience, and lectures and discussions on various techniques and approaches towards classroom management. One of my major assignments from this class was a research paper on the management theory of Dr. Marvin Marshall, who specializes in school disciplinary strategies. In my paper I examined how the techniques used by Dr. Marshall could be employed to combatting the pipeline between school systems and prison. The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the process by which certain students’ potentials are undermined and a path leading to imprisonment emerges through repeated disciplinary actions. In other words, if a student in schools is deemed as a repeat offender, their opportunities for success tend to diminish significantly. Dr. Marshall’s techniques of using procedures instead of rules and devising collaborative approaches to discipline between teachers and students. This assignment was pivotal in my process of developing my own classroom management philosophy regarding discipline. As teachers, I believe we can get trapped in cycles with students in which we anticipate a need for disciplinary action before it is required. While there needs to be a clear and regulated system of consequences, I believe we need to try to give students a clean slate after discipline has been properly administered and each time it is required. My time in Bridgewater’s education program has taught me that our communities are directly impacted by our school systems at all levels. If we do our best to ensure that each student has as many opportunities as we can provide for success, we can have a lasting effect on the wellness of our community. As a teacher, it is my responsibility to foster this mindset beyond the regular demands of the classroom.

Global Citizenship & Intercultural Competencies

[Essay Supporting Item](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/jlayton/essay-supporting-item-global-citizenship-and-intercultural-competencies/)

One major aspect of Bridgewater’s liberal arts approach to education is the inclusion of courses that emphasize education on global cultures. For my world cultures course, I took American Indian History. One major project I completed during the course was a research poster on one aspect of current American Indian life. The poster, which I completed with a partner, involved choosing a relevant topic to the current events we discussed in class lectures that involved American Indian affairs. The topic we chose was examining the lasting effects of the wars between the U.S. Government and the Navajo nation in the mid-19th century. The project was beneficial as an opportunity for presentation of research, which I believe is an important skill to learn in college. The project further opened my eyes to a variety of hardships facing people of certain backgrounds, whether socioeconomic or in this case cultural. Our research indicates that there are several consequences that still effect quality of life for Navajo descendants today. We discovered that many Navajo live in deep poverty without access to basic daily necessities. Before taking this course, I believe I possessed the ability to sympathize with the hardships experienced by other cultures. I believe that after taking the class, my views and feelings towards such hardships remain the same. I think something I would have appreciated from my World Cultures educational experience is more education on how to instill real change and become an activity participant in global community. I believe my class provided me with more information on the issues facing a specific culture, but in other areas of my education I feel more equipped to act on my new knowledge. For example, I believe that my Diversity in the Classroom and ethics and Identity classes have prepared me to be more participatory in the larger communities I participate in. I think I will engage in more ethical discussions with my peers in the future and will use my knowledge to develop my teaching strategies. However, I feel that my American Indian history class was mostly informative and that I will not be able to incorporate my discoveries into my professional career as much as the other skills I obtained at Bridgewater. That being said, however, I do appreciate the class and the newfound knowledge I have received and I believe I am better for being more informed on current issues facing specific current cultural groups.

Ethical Reasoning

[Essay Supporting Item](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/jlayton/essay-supporting-item-ethical-reasoning/)

In the fall of my junior year at Bridgewater I took Ethics and Identity with Dr. Yordy. This class acted as both my ethical reasoning credit and my writing-intensive course. At the start of the class, Dr. Yordy informed us that this was the most challenging class she teaches. Looking back, I was grateful to take such a challenging course because of the material that was presented. This class did more than any other during my time at Bridgewater to further my ethical thinking. Members of the class engaged in meaningful discussion on ethical issues regularly during each class period. People from many different backgrounds were able to compare and contrast views on morality and ethics as they pertain to our individual identities. My final project for this class was an assignment I am especially proud of. I wrote my final ethics paper on the problems regarding race and participation in school music programs. According to my research, there are established factors in our current system of music education that work against students of certain races and socioeconomic backgrounds. This paper was very fun to write since I am so passionate about the topic and I consider it some of my best work. The topic directly pertains to my professional career and is something I will consider every day in my planning and teaching strategy development. The course conditioned me to consider multiple different ethical perspectives and determine what my vison for morality on my teaching is. I now have a better sense of which values to prioritize in my classroom and how to instill a desire in my students to foster these values. As I have previously stated, I believe the values beyond the classroom that we as teachers demonstrate for our students have a direct impact on the wellbeing of our communities. I believe my Ethical Reasoning class sufficiently prepared me to consider the best possible way to approach ethical reasoning in my teaching.

Conclusion

I have thoroughly enjoyed my educational experience at Bridgewater. I believe that Bridgewater’s commitment to creating well-rounded students has reflected very well on my preparedness for a long teaching career. I believe I am much more aware of and responsive to ethical and professional issues than I was before college. While I understand nothing about my college education will completely prepare me for my career, I believe I have been given ample opportunities to become more versatile as an educator. I appreciate all the extracurricular organizations and events Bridgewater offers that align with my education. I feel ready to begin the career I’ve always wanted and am far better off for pursuing a well-rounded education at Bridgewater. Even though my experience hasn’t been exactly perfect, it has been very close and has more than sufficiently helped me develop my beliefs and values and learn how to apply them to my career. Overall, I am very excited to begin using the skills I have acquired at BC as I begin my journey as an educator.