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University Honors

Year-in-Review

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A Work in Progress

Going into a conservatory program from a very academic background, I was dubious as to whether I would feel challenged with a curriculum emphasized on musical theatre courses. As it turned out, I learned more about my craft and myself in this one year than I had from all my years of high school. My professors gave me the tools to break inefficient habits and to build a foundation for success. I find this idea epitomized through a tenet my acting teacher, Vince DeGeorge, taught us this year: “You are doing away with things that no longer serve you”. I find that phrase inspirational because it empowers me to continually adapt and learn in order to grow as an actor and an individual.

I think one of the most important things I learned in college was taking true ownership for everything I did. I was completely responsible for getting my own meals, doing my laundry, cleaning my cramped dorm room, and budgeting my time between school and friends. This responsibility was liberating, and I gained a better insight as to what life as a young adult will resemble. When we started working on auditions, monologues, songs, dance strength and other acting exercises, I realized that I had to invest so much more of myself into my work than I could with other courses, such as math, science or English. These traditional courses require determination to finish assignments, learn formulas and vocabulary, and prepare for a test. However, with my musical theatre studies, I was expected to actively reflect on my own life, and then use the realized awareness of certain emotions, memories and morals to fuel my practice. As I began to hone this skill, my work became more honest and relatable.

While recognizing academic progress is an important part of this reflection, I also feel this review would not be complete if I did not discuss what I learned outside of the classroom, particularly through my interaction with other students. This last year, I struggled with connecting to my peers in the musical theatre program because I suspected them of being superficial and insincere. My newfound maturity from my dad passing away unexpectedly during the summer caused me to distance myself from my classmates – I felt disconnected from what I perceived to be their petty gossip and struggles of adapting to life at college. I thought their woes paled in comparison to what I had experienced during the summer. After much deliberation, I realized I could not continue to hold them in judgment or expect them to value the same principles I did. Only by appreciating and empathizing with their worries and frivolities did I connect with them.

In high school, I had strong relationships with my teachers; they were affable and provided helpful advice. However, in college, I found myself making connections with my professors that left me increasingly grateful for what they taught me and what they shared with me. I found myself in one professor’s office more often than not this year because of his willingness to listen and empathize. I am of course referencing Vince DeGeorge, who I mentioned earlier. In my opinion, Vince was the most nurturing teacher I had this year because he took the time to actually connect with his students. I talked to Vince about a number of my thoughts, mostly regarding concerns with my class, my family, or feedback from performances. The ability to talk to one of the musical theatre faculty without fear of judgment made me feel secure that I was in an environment that could accept me for who I was. This security allowed me to have confidence in my work at UC.

I must also mention the two other faculty members crucial to my positive first year experience. Diane Lala was my Jazz dance instructor, and she instilled in me the foundation for a strong and successful dance background. She also gave me the assurance that if I maintained the same determined work ethic I showed in the first year, she could see me as a dancer on Broadway by the time I left CCM, which is one of my foremost goals. Her amicable countenance was juxtaposed with her fierce classroom expectations, yet she always managed to make me smile in class. Aubrey Berg, the head of the musical theatre department, surprised me the most. Throughout auditions and summer reminder emails, I took the impression that he may have been somewhat cold and antipathetic. I could not have been more wrong. He holds high demands for the freshmen, yes, but underneath the pride of his triple-threat program, I sensed his vested interest in each and every one of us. To my knowledge, Aubrey does not openly give praise nor does he open up to the freshmen, but one day he noticed me on a bench as he was leaving his office, and he told me that I was doing really well in Les Mis rehearsals. This remark reminded me that CCM is a place where I would have endless opportunity to grow and learn, and be made aware of my progress as a performer.

Ironically, I felt the most kinship with my class and the most at peace with the musical theatre program near the end of my second semester. When I realized this, I vowed to be more aware and more accepting of my experience for the next year. My goal for next year is to wholly reinvest myself in the experience at UC. Ideally, I want to omit all negative judgment and fear from my perception of people, places, and classes. I also want to become more involved in the Bearcat community in general. I think I have already taken a number of steps to guarantee this, such as becoming an Honors Ambassador and joining CCM Tribunal, but I feel there is always more to do. I look up to community leaders like Thaddaeus Voss, who is an organizer and advisor of many clubs. His drive and passion for pursuing his dreams is an inspiration to me, and I strive to leave a legacy with the Honors program and the UC community similar to his.