

For Ja'Miyah - and *Every* Student

One of the most revelatory conversations that brought to light the inequities many students face occurred while I was leading a choral rehearsal at Maximo Elementary in Pinellas County, Florida. The school was one of five “failure factories” majorly affected by the district’s decision to allow the expiration of a NAACP integration ruling to pass. While playing through vocal warmups to prepare the group for a combined concert with a school from the northern (predominately white) part of the district, a brave little girl named Ja’Miyah confidently raised her hand and said, “We’ve been learning about segregation in social studies, and I just wanna know...why are we still segregated?” The question spurred my aspirations to serve underprivileged students by taking tangible steps towards narrowing the opportunity gaps they face.

It’s a wholesome endeavor to plant seeds of knowledge as a teacher, but I’ve found that the greatest rewards I’ve received have come from affecting genuine change in the lives of students. A tailored Master’s degree in Public Administration with an emphasis on the development of public policy at The Evergreen State College and a summer internship with the Washington State Legislature will prepare me to advocate for students on a grander scale than I have been able to achieve as a classroom teacher.

While pursuing dual bachelor degrees in English and music education from the University of South Florida, I became fascinated with how children acquire knowledge. I partnered with Dr. Clint Randles to engage in undergraduate research via qualitative data collection of Russian pre-service and veteran music educators at Moscow State University under a Gilman grant. The results of the work first introduced me to the disparities in education between the U.S. and other countries.

Shortly after graduating, I was awarded a Fulbright ETA term in Moldova. In addition to serving as a resource teacher and regional SME of English, I networked with my local American Corner to create “Melodic Moldova!,” a group that provided combined English/choral lessons to ladies age 13-adult. Discussions centered around feminism, interculturalism, and the development

of business, learning, and networking opportunities for young women within Moldova. The group performed, spoke, and had the opportunity to meet leaders all over the country. During this time, I gained both hard and soft skills as a director, coordinator, educator, and advocate.

Following my Fulbright, I returned to Florida to work at one of the most challenging schools in the state - Maximo Elementary. The county's fine arts departments secured a federal grant that provided high quality professional development to arts teachers in the "failure factories" and five other schools. The Elevate A.R.T.S. program and its teachers worked diligently to increase student achievement in the arts and beyond by focusing on the development of quality relationships, technology inclusion, and cross-curricular learning (transforming STEM to STEAM).

While employed in Pinellas County Schools, I also served as a Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship Alumni Ambassador. I had the honor of working with IIE and regional higher education staff for a one year term to promote the scholarship and help fellow low-income students who previously thought their study abroad dreams too grand to actually be feasible. Assisting these students and taking on a greater role within education was extremely rewarding for me.

I moved to the Olympic area in 2022, and have found myself frustrated by the paper ceiling that looms above me. I want to move past the barriers my current credentials afford and use my MPA to be, as Dr. Amy Gould says, an "accomplice for change" by utilizing the program to research and network in every feasible way towards providing an equitable education for all students.

At the same time, I feel it's important to study in a program that values inquisition and reflection. I desire to graduate with the preparedness necessary to tackle any role in administrative or public policy with poise, efficiency, and integrity. Our nation faces a number of issues that require dedicated and invested individuals who will personally engage and serve the public by employing innovative and flexible solutions that will develop communities for the betterment of all.

I therefore appreciate how Evergreen's MPA program delves into every facet of public administration (social, cultural, political, and economic). Core classes teach students how to navigate "the complexity of public administration in terms of values, interests, and competing orientations toward inclusion, equity, and diversity," which aligns both with the experiences I've had as an educator and my future goals.

The faculty represent a broad range of backgrounds and experiences, and the program offers current, relevant courses that prepare the modern student, such as *AI: Public Service of What's Possible*. Support of learning styles via open transparency of professors' teaching styles shows a sincere dedication to knowledge and growth. Additionally, the general devotion of most staff seems to be towards a socratic method nurtured by lifelong learners who are genuinely interested in collaborating, motivating, and supporting students towards their goals.

Finally, elective offerings are tailored to meet areas of interest while also being broad enough to ensure adaptability. For instance, I could gain theoretical knowledge of public policy within the field of education in *Ethics: The Pathway to the Good Life*. What is the good life? For whom? Most would argue that a quality education is a part of that. How can I do my part to ensure its inclusion? I could then apply that theory and other knowledge gained in classes practically towards my dream by conducting research and working to meet my goals by, say, *Engaging the Legislature!* and taking part in a possible credit-generating, paid summer internship with the Washington State Legislature.

I can truly think of no institution more perfectly suited to my interests and ambitions. I am confident in my abilities to excel as a graduate student and as one who can help lead the next generation in service. Thank you so very much for your consideration!