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### MA in Humanities: A Reflective Journey

When I joined the faculty of Rappahannock Community College, I had the credentials to teach freshman and sophomore level courses in History, Political Science, and Education. Over the last fourteen years I have observed a variety of changes at our institution that have driven my personal development. As one of two full-time History professors, I was primarily responsible for courses on our Warsaw campus, though I occasionally taught on our Glens campus. Our other History professor also taught across campuses, and in addition to History, she also taught Humanities courses. With her retirement imminent, I felt the need to pick up the credentials to take over her former courses.

After a brief stint in administration, I returned to the classroom and sought to pick up the credentials to teach English courses. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, having those credentials proved to be beneficial. We lost a few longtime adjuncts who either passed away or no longer desired to teach in person. At the same time, Virginia was going through an initiative to guarantee the transferability of our courses to our four-year state institutions. As a result of this process, the primary Humanities class that we offered was eliminated, and my colleague decided not to offer anything else. While I did not wish to step on the toes of one who had far more seniority than I did, I wanted to be prepared for her departure so that our students would once again have the opportunity to engage with interdisciplinary humanities courses.

I began the MA program in Spring 2024 with the intention of only completing 18 credit hours. That number is the minimum required by our accreditor, SACS-COC, to become credentialed in a teaching discipline. That intent changed when I received word via email that the program would be phased out. I decided to see it through, and I am pleased I did. The coursework and assignments throughout the program allowed me to further enhance my knowledge of various fields, such as literature and religion, and such knowledge has easily translated into better teaching.

While the MA program at APUS heavily featured literature, I was able to investigate other fields, such as art and media. The interdisciplinary nature of the program fit well with my current background, and I was able to study and research topics that can be included in the new Humanities courses I hope to offer at our college. Given their absence from the schedule for a few years now, it will be refreshing to offer our students new opportunities, especially those in our prison-education program who have previously had remarkably limited options for courses.

Prior to this program I had earned an MEd, an MA, and a PhD. I had achieved the rank of full professor, and I had received awards for teaching and service. Despite these accomplishments, embarking on another MA program with the intention of being able to provide a service to my students seemed like a phenomenal idea. Having been raised with service in mind, this program has helped me achieve more than just becoming more knowledgeable. It has aided me in becoming a better human. I have a stronger appreciation for the arts and for the great works of our past and present, an appreciation I hope to pass on to both my students and my children.

Completing the program by building a portfolio was rather challenging. The idea of a portfolio itself was nothing new but narrowing the items in it down to five proved more difficult

that I originally thought. In the end I sought to choose items from various classes that represented a breadth of accomplishment in the program. Furthermore, I desired to choose items that represented my personal interests. For example, as a self-proclaimed nerd I enjoy popular culture. Including essays on television's role in society, time travel in fiction, and a character analysis from a cult television show, highlight not only a sense of scholarship but an appreciation for modern culture while respecting the culture of the past.

The courses in the program allowed me to build upon prior knowledge. For example, for my graduate certificate in English I completed a course called "Great Works of Ancient Literature." Though the content was remarkably similar to HUMN 510 – The Ancient World, the Humanities course also incorporated elements of art, religion, and philosophy which were largely absent in the English course. Similarly, I studied Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in multiple courses, and each time there was a different perspective. The beauty of the Humanities is that students and scholars alike can observe its elements from different aspects and examine them with respect to other fields like art and philosophy. Another course I had previously completed was on Greek Tragedy, which again focused solely on the literary aspects of Greek playwrights. In this MA program, I was able to examine those topics further, which is what I did with the Clytemnestra presentation that is included in my portfolio. For that assignment I was able to look beyond the text to the culture impact the play made by examining artistic depictions of Clytemnestra.

Though this degree was not necessary for my current position, and it will not help me achieve a new position, it is certainly appreciated. My college is currently going through a number of changes that will allow me to implement what I have learned in this program. My new colleague will be able to take on some of my duties, and I can pass on some of my Political

Science course assignments to adjuncts. We are also transitioning all of our courses from 16 to 8 week offerings in Fall 2027. An analysis shows that we will need to offer more sections of different courses as a result of this change, and I will have the time and opportunity to grow our Humanities offerings. It appears that the timing is right to finish this program.