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Econ Adventure Fund

Exploring Inquiry at NCTE in Baltimore

This past weekend, I had the privilege of being a presenter at the NCTE Annual Conference in Baltimore, Maryland. Thanks to my former high school English teacher, Dr. Lisa Scherff, I was able to share my experience of how implementing research in the high school setting can set students up for collegiate success. I spoke to a room full of educators from all over the country about how Dr. Scherff's methods taught me to think like a researcher, and how inquiry surrounds all facets of life. I explained how her approach to teaching inspired me to pursue research in a more qualitative setting, specifically highlighting my choice to pursue a degree in economics, a discipline which shows first hand the importance of mixed methods research. Beyond presenting, I was able to attend numerous other sessions that pertained to topics such as minority representation in the classroom, and stories of first and second generation Americans; topics that align closely with my future research endeavors. My experience at NCTE helped to reignite my passion for inquiry, and has inspired me to be more proactive in taking hold of opportunities at UNC, particularly through the economics department.

Firstly, I want to contextualize my presentation. When I was in high school, I took AP Research with Dr. Scherff, a class that essentially required students to write a mini dissertation (20-25 pages) on their own original research. The most pertinent takeaways from the class are that topics were driven by student interest, all projects were individual yet worked through in

peer-mentored groups, and all research methods/writing styles were accepted. All of that being said, I chose to pursue a qualitative interview study in which I determined the motivations of students in my school to audition for extracurricular music ensembles. Dr. Scherff's teaching strategies helped to pave my understanding of research as a tool for all types of questions, not just quantitative ones. Through her instruction, I conducted, transcribed, and coded nearly 20 interviews to present in my final project. For our session, I wanted to bring attention to the skills research implementation taught me, and how said skills impacted my transition into college. Most importantly, I wanted to convey that research implementation is feasible at all levels, and any skill will be beneficial to students, regardless of difficulty or length.

I felt proud to share my experience as an economics major with the educators in the session. Without AP Research, I may not have found my calling in social science, nor would I have imagined conducting the research I have through UNC Economics. I was able to share my experiences with the teachers and provide my own example of how research implementation can impact students' journeys through higher education. I emphasized that the knowledge I gained from research instruction in high school impacted my own college search. I explained that this kind of instruction can be the difference between a student attending a small two year institution and a larger, research focused university. I explained how UNC was able to provide me with opportunities to explore my own research questions, and how I knew after taking Dr. Scherff's class that UNC would be the right fit for me.

After my presentation, I wanted to take advantage of the conference as an avenue into exploring my future research interests. I imagined being in a space full of educators and inquiry would provide some inspiration, and I am happy to report that I was right. Since taking AP Research, I have made it a goal of mine to complete a senior honors thesis. This is something I

am continually working towards, and have been contemplating more and more as my undergraduate career nears its end. Over the course of the weekend, I attended multiple sessions that had to do with topics surrounding minority experiences and representation in America. I plan on combining my passions and two majors of economics and global studies to conduct research in the area of Latin American development. Whether it be creating a new development index quantitatively, or interviewing members of the Latinx community on their experiences in the U.S. job market, I aim to dive deeper into this topic I feel so passionate about. After attending numerous sessions hosted by educators who were immigrants or first or second generation Americans, I have become inspired to reorient my view to the Latinx community within the U.S. Due to the limits of creating a thesis in one academic year, I now have the idea of assessing the level of development of Latinx immigrants and first or second generation Americans within the U.S., hopefully based on an index of my own creation.

My weekend in Baltimore was exponentially more impactful than I had imagined. Although I knew the context of my presentation, I did not expect the amount of interest and attendance by educators from around the country. I was humbled to answer questions about my own experience, knowing that my insight might impact the lives of future high school students. I planned on attending sessions, but was wary about how much I would learn from a conference centered around English education. I was pleasantly surprised by the abundance of sessions pertaining to minority representation, particularly migrant rights in the United States. I had the opportunity to pose questions and network with individuals whose careers are centered around these international development issues. Most importantly, this conference has inspired me to refine my potential honors thesis topic into something that I hope will be impactful not only for my future, but for the future of members of the Latinx community.