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FROM STUDENT CONSULTING AT MY LIBERAL ARTS INSTITUTION TO APPLYING TO LAW SCHOOL

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When I think about my time and experience as a student consultant in the Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, I think of a space where I was able to foster healing from personal educational trauma and where my passion for DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) peaked. Little did I know that this passion I cultivated would lead me to choose law school as my next step. In this essay I reflect on how my pedagogical partnership work has been an important space for personal and professional development (Cook-Sather, Cott, Seay, & Stewart, forthcoming) and for clarifying the social-justice commitments I want to continue to pursue.

Through SaLT, I have facilitated what we refer to as [Pedagogy Circles](#)—weekly virtual sessions in which faculty, staff, and students explore together how to make learning spaces more equitable and inclusive. With the Pedagogy Circles, I am able to challenge professors and students to communicate beyond the standard curriculum, talk vulnerably about my experience as a Black student attending a PWI (predominantly white institution), and discuss campus community issues alongside those of the United States more broadly, as those relate to social justice and DEI initiatives. In addition to this, I have had the privilege of co-facilitating, with another BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) student, our Pedagogy Circle for BIPOC Faculty, which was created to provide a specific space for faculty of color to connect with students of color and the campus community practice (Cook-Sather, Stewart, Ameyaa, & Jones, in press). For me, the Pedagogy Circles collective helped me see the value of bringing people from various backgrounds together to discuss institutional change, talk accountability to produce action, and emphasize the value of holding consistent forums for forward conversation rather than only once conflict arises.

This work has been important to me as a person as well as a future lawyer. As a first-generation college student from Houston, Texas, and a Black woman attending a liberal arts college in suburban Pennsylvania, I found the social environment was not always welcoming. I can recall when our campus was notified that there had been two incidents on January 21st and February 1st of 2022 where anti-Black hate speech was written in a dormitory called Rockefeller directly across the street from our campus's ECC (Enid Cook Center), which was named after the first Black graduate of Bryn Mawr and serves as the dormitory for our Black and Latinx students. Being a Black student consultant at this time felt very weird because I was disturbed and fearful for my safety but also felt compelled to do something with those feelings. In facilitating my Pedagogy Circles for that week, I was able to use my positionality as a basis for our conversation, engage with professors and Bryn Mawr and Haverford College community members about the incident, and invite their thoughts and concerns. I was able to use the forum to convey the reality of that situation and how it was handled to various members in the college communities. In the Pedagogy Circle for BIPOC Faculty, I was also able to find a sense of security because I could share my sentiments with faculty who looked like me. Having these open spaces taught me how to be comfortable advocating for the importance of attending to my own and others' lived experiences as well as how to adapt and listen to multiple perspectives

with resolution and understanding at the forefront. This role has molded me into a woman who can identify when there's an imbalance of power in various social settings and strategize how to navigate building community despite that resistance.

During my time in the SaLT program, I have also worked in one-on-one partnerships with faculty members in various departments. The most influential of these partnerships in terms of my choice to pursue a law degree was with a faculty member in Bryn Mawr's Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research. This partnership put into action what it would be like to fight for people from diverse backgrounds with traumatic experiences in a multitude of scenarios. In my partnership with this professor, my responsibilities included sitting in on two courses, one in Spring of 2022 and the other in the Summer of 2022, and having a weekly meeting with my faculty partner to discuss things like: students' engagement, faculty prep for class, pedagogical methods, student feedback, and my in-class observations and notes. In the first course for which I consulted I witnessed and participated in conversations that directly confronted topics such as white privilege, ableism, religion, institutional and structural oppression, and gender. One of my fondest memories of this partnership was watching truth-telling documentaries like *The 13th* (2016), *If These Halls Could Talk* (2014), and *Examined Life* (2009). It became very clear to me that people with non-traditional or underrepresented identities need more people like themselves to not only support them but also to fight for their truth in often complex situations. This theoretical understanding of oppression and how it impacts all of humankind, though some more than others, in connection with facilitating the Pedagogy Circles, ignited my enthusiasm for morality and advocacy.

The second course for which I partnered with this same faculty member was designed to help equip social work professionals and case workers with background knowledge on the types of traumas that may impact their clients from various ages, genders, races, and socioeconomic statuses. My role as a consultant for this course taught me the language to recognize when someone is suffering from traumatic history as well as how to formulate steps and resources to help clients rehabilitate from complex situations. Even more so, this course helped me conceptualize the large amounts of people who can or may be in situations where they are taken advantage of because they don't have the language to critique the system they are working in or the mental health capacity to fight for what they deserve.

This two-part partnership was life changing because it was also the first time I worked one on one with a woman faculty member of color. The work was influential because it was truly a partnership: my faculty partner affirmed my suggestions when I offered them, and it helped build my confidence to see someone teaching and essentially embodying what I'd hope to be one day. In this partnership and my work in the Pedagogy Circle for BIPOC Faculty, I was able to reaffirm faculty and community members and help them build confidence in their pedagogical practices. But more so, these experiences revealed that creating a mutually beneficial forum built on advocacy and being heard fosters a strong sense of community for all parties involved.

The opportunity to be a SaLT student consultant began with my interest in education and blossomed into a love for advocacy and social justice and pursuing a Juris Doctor degree. This role has also inspired my thesis research on tracing the belonging of Black and Brown students in the bi-college consortium of Bryn Mawr and Haverford. My goal is to amplify the voices of

Black underrepresented identities on these campuses to inform administrators at the colleges of the realities we face in pursuit of our degrees at our PWI's. I know that these consulting experiences in association with my sociology foundation through my major helped solidify that I want to be someone who fights for justice for all but also teaches people that differences should be celebrated and respected rather than ridiculed and seen as a threat. I hope to use my juris doctorate to be a resource to those who do not have the financial means to represent themselves in the court of law and teach those from marginalized identities about social institutions and how oppressive systems of power can be when uninformed. Most importantly, I am grateful for this professional work experience because it has affirmed that I am more than capable of being successful in the legal and educational fields. The SaLT program changed my life, and I will carry with me into my study of law the insights I gained into how to recognize trauma, advocate for others, and support what I call "full circle"—meaning both closing loops and filling space in ways that are life affirming and healing.

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