Career Exploration Paper

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Introduction

I am currently a first-year student at the University of Washington and I am incredibly connected to my identity and culture as a Latina from central Washington. As a first-generation college student, my journey in higher education has been one with lots of learning and overcoming obstacles. Due to my experience in the past as a minority navigating the ins and outs of higher education, I am intending to major in Political Science and Education, Communities, and Organizations (E.C.O.). I am hoping to find a career within government with a focus on education equity or within a non-profit organization that provides extra resources to low-income students of color. With that in mind, the career research I have conducted falls into one of those types of institutions that will allow me to influence education accessibility either through public policy or local organizations.

Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OPSI)

Overview

The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OPSI) oversees public schools within Washington State. OPSI's mission is to "transform K–12 education to a system that is centered on closing opportunity gaps and is characterized by high expectations for all students and educators" which is achieved by "developing equity-based policies and supports that empower educators, families, and communities." OPSI provides public school's resources for learning subjects, education requirements (such as curriculum standards and graduation requirements), and legal status regarding up and coming legislation that could affect day-to-day school functions. OPSI focuses on the government and institutional aspects of the education system, working closely with legislators and public officials to regulate the standard of the curriculum and create equitable opportunity for education.

Employment Options

Based on the official website of OPSI, there are a few job opportunities that are available within the institution. One that particularly interests me is the Workgroup & Committees section of OPSI. There are currently 19 active workgroups that advise legislation ranging from family engagement (Family Engagement Framework Workgroup) to budgeting and finance (Accounting Manual Committee). It is apparent that there are many options available within these committees and one that stood out to me are: Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee. This committee was created to "address the achievement gap in Washington state" and also have the ability to authorize certain bills. Most available positions offered currently are focused around budgeting and research opportunities. However, most meetings held within the committees are open to the public and offer past meeting minutes and records available online.

Relation to Strengths, Interests, Goals

When considering what strengths I could bring to OPSI, I think I would have to emphasize my ability to work well with others and pay close attention to small details. This is especially important when identifying problems within a certain area of education and when considering how new programs and policy will affect certain groups. As someone who has had lots of experience learning how to identify obstacles and how to make change, I think I would definitely bring a lot to this type of environment.

This type of work is especially interesting to me because I think that my background and experience is not often represented in these higher institutions. I also find it interesting because I am able to make change on a large level, one that not only affects a local school but would hopefully benefit a whole community to receive an equitable education. Public policy is a subject that has always intrigued me and I have always wanted to make a beneficial long term impact.

Lastly, this career would give me the opportunity to achieve my goal of dismantling barriers that prevent low-income students of color from reaching higher education or just being connected to their education in general. I have a goal to advocate for educational equity especially for minority students and this career would provide me with the outlet to do so.

Non-Profit Organization Administration

Overview

Currently I am interning with a local tutoring center, Canopy Scholars, and Canopy is a non-profit organization that aims to "provide an environment for students to grow into their full potential as scholars through tutoring, STEM, and community building programs." My experience as an intern has allowed me not only to work directly with students and catch a glimpse into what a career in teaching would look like, but also to observe the supervisor team to understand how a non-profit tutoring program is organized and functioned.

Employment Options

While conducting my research for an organization like Canopy in the central Washington area, more specifically in the city of Wenatchee (where I am from) I was able to quickly confirm that there is no program yet established for low-income students of color. However, I applied to Canopy in order to understand how I can take what I've learned from this program and establish a similar organization in my hometown, Wenatchee. So one self-driven career option is starting a non-profit organization to provide academic support and tutoring to minority students. Readingrockets.org, provides some tips on how to begin establishing a non-profit tutoring center which includes an important step of creating partnerships with other institutions.

Relationship to Strength, Interests, Goals

One advantage I have received, which I would consider a strength, is the experience working with an organization that is already established and currently still being able to improve their program. Canopy has provided a lot of skills that are still growing but will eventually be strengths, like: goal setting, knowing how to interact with kids, and learning how to create a community.

Creating a non-profit tutoring organization is really interesting to me because I am able to work locally to help individual students move past institutional barriers. While I think policy change is incredibly important, even influencing one individual's story is incredibly impactful and has always intrigued me. Sometimes it is the smallest support systems that make a student feel welcomed in a community and encouraged to pursue their goals.

This type of career also aligns with my goals of bridging a connection between minority students and their education by creating a supportive environment and community for students to excel in their academics. I feel that I am still able to achieve my goal of helping student reach higher education because a tutoring center will be individually impactful and create stronger, genuine connections that can support a student on their own path to success.

Opportunities for Improvement

Based on what I've learned from my research, I realize that I have a lot of learning to do, and that's not at all a terribly bad thing. As I researched OPSI, I realized that I should consider taking courses related to finance and budgeting work. I realized that economics plays a large role in providing resources and financial knowledge could allow me to understand how to implement policies better. Additionally, I can begin gaining experience at OPSI by engaging in a committee's monthly meetings that are available to the public. This will give me the opportunity to observe what issues are on the table currently and the structure before I am expected to

contribute to the conversation as a career. As for entering a non-profit organization, I think a course I should take should be related to teaching education of some sort. If I want to provide a space for students to learn, I must know how to teach in order to help students learn. There is a course actually, EDUC170 that covers this exact content but specifically with teaching math. Another course I should take to create a tutoring program is one relating to child development. I know that the UW offers lots of courses related to child and adolescent development and even a major for Early Childhood and Family Studies. This knowledge can help me better understand how to work with students effectively and intentionally.

Similarly, one piece of information I was not able to find while researching OPSI is whether they offer internship opportunities. Some government agencies provide some sort of fellowship and it would be incredibly beneficial to find out if OPSI also offers internships. Another piece of information I wasn't able to find with regard to creating a non-profit organization was what specific legal requirements and steps are needed to actually establish a program. The legal knowledge will definitely help to understand the constraints and benefits provided to an organization as it is beginning to be established.

Conclusion: A New Perspective

This research paper has shifted my perspective on what possible carriers I have within government and non-profit organizations. I think that it has made me realize what type of courses I should prioritize or at least consider taking. For example, a budgeting class and/or an early childhood development course. It has definitely encouraged me to understand what the goals in my career are and how I can achieve them. I will still consider these careers as a possibility and begin gaining the experience and knowledge needed to thrive in these areas to contribute back to communities that are more than capable of achieving academic success.

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