Dan and Kat Schorr, husband and wife, both worked as Program Managers at the University of Southern Maine prior to entering the Adult and Higher Education program. Dan worked in the Professional Development center, which focused on professional development for educators, school counselors, and school psychologists, while Kat managed the Professional Education Department. While they didn’t actually start the program at the same time they did spend one year in the program together. Dan began his Graduate school journey in 2006 and encouraged his wife to pursue the program, and one year later she did exactly that. Both Dan and Kat were inspired by the desire to improve their practice.

Given that they were both employed by USM they had some familiarity with the Adult and Higher Education program, however for Dan, it was years before he made the connection between adult education and the work he was doing in the Professional Development Center.

Kat admitted to being “very nervous about enrolling in a graduate program since a number of years had gone by since she completed her Bachelor's degree”. She said that all changed when she enrolled in her very first course, that’s when she knew the program was a “perfect fit for her”. “I felt very welcomed by the program’s professors, and my classmates were friendly. Our assignments were challenging and highly relevant, so they prompted fantastic conversations inside and outside of the classroom; I was fully engaged from day one!” Additionally, she felt as though her previous professional experience was valued and that the professors understood that each individual in the classroom had something meaningful and relevant to contribute regardless of how diverse their backgrounds and career aspirations were. “The program itself supported the very adult learning principles that we were learning about!”

Dan changed his focus three times during the course of the program. He began the program as a way to improve his existing practice in program development and towards the middle of the program found an interest in research, and by the end was excited about teaching. “I don’t think that could have been possible in many other programs in the country. The ability to customize and explore different facets of adult education was the corner stone of the program for me. At the beginning of the program I wouldn’t have said that was an important feature, but by the end I would have been sorely disappointed if I hadn’t had the opportunity to explore research and teaching.”

Both Dan and Kat agree that all the courses in the Adult and Higher Education program were rich and meaningful in different ways. In terms of a particularly significant course, Kat said “the facilitation course was excellent. I have to speak in front of groups every week now, and I owe a lot of my public speaking skills to that course!” Dan attributes much of his development to the required research course. “I was able to see real research being conducted for practical application. It took the academic study into the profession and showed that data was essential for making informed decisions.”

Professor Michael Brady was highly influential in Kat’s work in the program. His passion for teaching and adult learning was evident in every class session. “He created and supported an atmosphere in the classroom where we could explore and take risks, and he asked us to examine our perceptions and break down our assumptions on what education is and should be all about.” Professor Karen Day was also a powerful influence in the program.
“Her meticulous attention to the success of each student was obvious and appreciated. She encouraged us to stretch our minds, collaborate with each other, and grow our skills and abilities.” It was a combination of the faculty as a whole that influenced Dan’s work in the program most. “The diversity of instructors from a variety of backgrounds allowed an opportunity to learn from people in different professions, rather than a strict academic perspective. It showed not only what was possible but also how those various professions interacted”.

Several years after graduating from the Adult and Higher Education program, Dan accepted a position as Program Manager for Development and Marketing in the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at Anne Arundel Community College in Maryland. Shortly after he and his wife and their one and half year old daughter relocated, Kat secured a position as Grant Navigator for the National STEM consortium in the same college. The STEM consortium is an “alliance of ten community colleges in nine states aiming to develop innovative one-year certificate programs to retrain workers for high-demand, mid-skill technical careers”. Dan spends at least half his time working with faculty, vendors, and organizations to develop and offer professional development in the fields of health care, social work and counseling, real estate, business, human resources, and for those seeking professional licensure, certification, or re-certification. Another major part of his work is marketing. He is responsible for developing a marketing strategy for each program his department offers. Additionally, he participates on various college committees, including the Institutional Assessment Team (IAT) that develops and monitors key performance indicators for determining whether the college has achieved its goals within its strategic plan.

Kat’s main responsibilities are focused on recruitment, retention, and job placement assistance. She meets with prospective students, supports current students and develops relationships with employers. During a typical week she is running open houses, visiting workforce agencies, talking with student referrals, and reaching out to local employers about hiring her students. “My calendar is pretty hectic, so I am constantly on the move between classroom visits, program promotional opportunities and business networking events”. Kat does well juggling multiple priorities. Balancing her job demands at USM and her work in the Adult and Higher Education Master’s Degree program prepared her well for this role.

According to Kat, this program “is ideal for people who want to enhance their leadership presence and teaching abilities in an adult education setting, whether it is linked to higher education, business and nonprofit trainings, or any other setting where you find yourself guiding others in the pursuit of knowledge.” She also strongly urges anyone that is considering a professional career in student affairs to enroll in this program.

Dan thinks the program is great for “anyone interested in expanding or changing their professional practice, who are working with adults in any type of education setting, from traditional academia to corporate training to non-profit or faith-based organizations.” He claims that there are many different avenues in adult education and “this program provides a road map to whichever direction one wants to explore.”

The Schorr’s are both enjoying their new roles in Higher Education and are grateful for the experiences that the Adult and Higher Education Program was able to provide. They along with their three year old daughter Mary, are very happy with their new life in Maryland, both professionally and personally. They say the biggest difference between the two states is the reversal of how long summer and winter last. In Maine winter lasts six months, and in Maryland summer lasts six months. Lucky them!