Adult and Higher Education Alumni Stories: Greg Fall

Greg Fall spent many years working in the field of human resource consulting for both non-profit and for-profit organizations before he decided to obtain his Master’s in Adult and Higher Education. He recounted a few reasons that led him to the USM campus. Most importantly there was the solid reputation of the full and part-time faculty as well as the program itself. He had done his research comparing the other programs available and found the program at USM superior. Secondly his mother, Marijane Fall, at the time Professor Emerita at USM, encouraged him to take advantage of what the program had to offer and gave it her stamp of approval.

With certainty he described the most celebrated part of his experience at USM this way: “The relationships with and between faculty and co-learners make this one of highest quality programs available. The program has the best professors around.”

Reflecting on the most difficult part of pursuing this degree, without hesitation he stated “Online courses, while convenient, are simply more work.” Students need to be committed to the time required. He also emphasized the crucial concept of authenticity. His advice was simple: “Commit the time to real openness, authenticity and empathy; easy in concept, much more challenging in practice.”

Though it may be hard to pinpoint the most pivotal courses for some, Greg enthusiastically provided detailed descriptions of the courses he found most influential in his educational experience at USM.

In HRD 639 (The Heart of Teaching) his reflection was laced with a chuckle as he recounted one quote by Stephen Brookfield that he continues to use today: “Teaching is messy business.” Greg discovered another influential author, Parker Palmer, in this course. “Parker Palmer and his concept of wholeness was amazing.” Other prominent names in the Adult and Higher Education field such as Patricia Cranton and Jack Mezirow-peppered the interview, illustrating how the foundations established through his learning at USM continue to infuse his work and practice.

HRD 667 (Action Research) was another course whose influence was far reaching. The research path that Greg chose for this course was instrumental in helping to build a bridge between adult learning and understanding millennials in his current practice at Core Choices Consulting.
Greg’s experience in HRD 631 (The Adult Learner) was a “true dive to spirit”. He recalled the importance of the Learning Autobiography assignment within this course. He described the process of prioritizing self-reflection in order to confront and embrace his own adult learning as a paradox. Greg described the paradox as the adult learner moving toward “internal wholeness” and “greater humanness by developing their unique spirit” while simultaneously being pulled in “many disparate directions to confront externally-based fears.” This learning eventually led to his capstone project about taking off “the mask of fear” and how the realizations in his studies at USM helped him to see that he needed to follow the very advice he was so diligently imparting to his clients.

As he reflected on HRD 631, Greg reminisced about experiencing Black Elk Speaks for the third time since his high school career. As he listened to the story in his car, moved by the narrator’s voice that was tempered with an audible Native American accent, he realized he was finally “getting it” as he found salience in the story as it connected with his learning.

When asked how his experience at USM influenced his career Greg’s animated response was; “It complimented my professional practice, helping to provide greater context. It also affirmed my interest in teaching at the university level.” Since graduating with his Masters in Adult and Higher Education Greg has taught an undergraduate course at USM entitled “Choices, Changes, and Careers” and a graduate-level one in career development. In addition, Greg choose to grow his private consulting practice in order to enjoy more autonomy, developing unique concepts to help others in career transition and in the world of work.

Recalling his experience as a graduate student, Greg offered that his learning at USM “allowed him to better understand the concepts he was already practicing by providing him with a connection to theory.”

Greg reflected on his diverse consulting career and how important it is for him to meet the particular needs of each individual he helps. He considers himself “mostly a humanist and social cognitivist,” but that he chooses to be informed by alternative theoretical constructs if the individual he is helping needs a different approach: “I am able to morph and provide guidance in a way that works better for them.” While he has developed his own area of professional expertise in the career field, Greg still truly thinks of himself as a “co-learner,” especially after his experience at USM. The program helped him graduate to a place where he could be more effective in his everyday practice.

Greg referenced Hesse’s Siddhartha when asked about what brought him to the Adult and Higher Education program at the University of Southern Maine: “Each person is on his own unique journey; none of us has a journey like any other’s.” He recounted that USM was “the right fit with me as I walked along my own personal and professional path” and that his experience “helped me better understand myself and make a positive difference in the lives of others.”