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ENGL 2089

25 July 2023

Autoethnography of a Discourse Community First Draft

August 15, 2022 was the day my life forever changed. I woke up pretty tired from both being with new friends the night before and sleeping in a new room for the very first time. First real day on campus. I did not know what to expect. Sure, I'm from Cincinnati myself so nothing could be too crazy. But this was different. Sitting on a new campus with new people from all over the world is so different from being in a classroom with people who all live a block away from the school. I did not know what to expect but was so eager to walk into this new chapter of my life.

Walking into the Steger Student Life Center for the first time might be the highlight of my college career (well, at least so far). I stepped into room 555 where the Office of Ethnic Programs and Services was held and was faced with my new reality. Finally being in a room of people who were like me. Throughout high school I was usually the only person truly excited to learn and definitely the only person who looked like me, so walking into this room and it being full of other first year scholars who had the same interests as me was amazing. Walking in I immediately saw another girl with the same hairstyle and Starbucks strawberry acai refresher as me and began talking to her. We found even more similarities between each other and started to form a bond. Why were we in the same room to begin with? Room 555 in the Steger Student Life Center serves as the home of the members of the Darwin T. Turner Scholars program. The

Turner Scholars program has greatly impacted my life through how the group is organized in terms of communication and meetings.

Prospective members of the Darwin T. Turner Scholars program are invited to apply to the group during their senior year of high school based on certain criteria about them surrounding their advocacy for diversity and inclusion, whether or not they are part of an underrepresented community, and if they are a first generation student. From here, essays are written and read by top university professionals and then a small number are chosen to be a part of this group for their four years in undergraduate school. The namesake of this scholarship program Darwin T. Turner was the youngest graduate of the University of Cincinnati having graduated at the age of 16, and he was an African American student, making this a scholarship program full of students who also fit some of these criteria (I mean go Black excellence!). Being a part of this group is something special on a national stance as only 1 in 8 students actually receives a scholarship for their undergraduate schooling (Woodward). Spending so much time together, the members of this program become more than just regular pupils. They become a family. And the way in which they communicate with each other is quite important to the success of the program and its members.

Communication inside the Turner Scholars community varies in a number of ways. Sean Johnson III is an incoming second year student at the University of Cincinnati that is also a part of the Turner Scholars program. In asking him about some of the different communication methods that are used he said, “The best communication method I had for all of our information was definitely my mentor. She would always text if something big was going on and send me all the details in case I did not check my Canvas or my email.” All first year students are paired with an upperclassman mentor that can help them in different ways academically, socially,

emotionally, honestly the list goes on. I was also paired with a mentor that was an upperclassman and being able to meet with her and ask questions about any upcoming events, applications, and more helped me feel a lot more at ease. The daily actions and activities that occur inside of the Office of Ethnic Programs and Services also help to bring comfort and a feeling of having a family to new members of the Turner Scholars program. Students can come in and have quiet time to complete homework, can ask staff any questions that they may have, come sit down with friends and play board games, come eat their lunch, the options are absolutely endless. There is always someone in the office to talk to, meaning that the feeling of home and purpose is always present in this room. Having this way of personal communication is so very important, but what about for the large group?

Messages that are needed to be heard by the entire group are sent through the Announcements tab on the group Canvas page. In this space, the university staff in charge of the Turner Scholars program as well as the students that serve as heads of committees inside of the program can send messages to all members of the group on dates and times of meetings, internship and volunteer opportunities, upcoming event details, and so much more. Messages can be quick and casual like “Remember to meet in Tangeman University Center tonight at 6” or could be more lengthy with information on an upcoming event (Turner Olympics, Field Trip Information, First Year Induction, etc). These messages can pop up for students as either Canvas notifications, email notifications, or both, making it honestly up to the student on how exactly they want the important information communicated to them.

While having this main way of communication can work for a majority of people, there are a lot of people and students who do not sign into their Canvas pages daily and may miss something that pops up. There are some students like Camilla Yankson, second year member of

the program, who “have [her] Canvas notifications on both [her] phone and email so [she] read[s] every message right as [she] receives them.” There are also other students who’d rather not have their schoolwork follow them home, so their only notifications are on their computers that they do not open past certain times. New articles and research recommend that people and groups trying to communicate with college students should look into using social media to engage with their members (Ericksen). The Turner Scholars program has followed this well by posting flyers of upcoming group events and ‘meet the member’ posts on their Instagram page, doing all that they can to engage with their members in ways that they will actually respond.

October 3, 2022 was another day my life changed forever. This day was the induction ceremony for us first year members of the Turner Scholars program. All freshmen, ambassadors, seniors, and our families came together to make this night special. Each of us incoming members got to have our headshots and information up on a large screen, got pinned into the program, and celebrated with each other for making it this far. Because our families were present there were some moments when the lingo that was spoken was confused by those in the audience. The way in which we describe the different age groups are “freshman, sophomore, pre-junior, junior, and senior” and a lot of parents made confusing faces when hearing one that they had never heard before. Another exclusive thing that our group does is “Rep the T”, something that outside members always seemed confused by but it is a way of showing our excellence. The day of the induction ceremony was actually the first time that our freshman class was allowed to “Rep the T” which made the day even more special.

This group has many ways to communicate. Canvas, email, text messaging, social media. All of it comes together to allow for greatness of the students inside of this program. After walking into the Office of Ethnic Programs and Services for the first time on August 15 in 2022 I

found my best friends for the rest of my life and I communicate with them on a daily basis. We talk to each other through text messaging, Instagram DMs, TikTok messages, literally everything. The way the Darwin T. Turner Scholars program is structured in terms of communication allowed me to meet my best friends and I will forever be grateful. We all come together with the same goal of showcasing our Black excellence on the campus of the University of Cincinnati and I could not be prouder to be a part of this group.

Works Cited

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