

The Only Constant is Change

Time changes everything; I am no exception and neither are the goals that I had when I initially took the leap to obtain my master's degree.

Despite this, I always knew that my overall goal was not going to change, but not out of any sort of stubbornness or closed-mindedness. My long term goal has not changed only due to the nebulousness and timeline of the goal; it is easy to say something as vague as I want to become a mathematics teacher. And since I am in the United States Air Force for at least another five years, it was obvious that I wouldn't be able to fully embark on that journey until my service is done. But the road to get there has certainly taken some unforeseen turns.

How does that saying go? Life is what happens when you're busy making plans? My intermediate goals are where change has taken place with me during this program. I originally had the short-term goal to become an instructor at the assignment I had when I applied to the program. I was in a rut within the Air Force and thought that reclaiming the satisfaction I had when I was previously an instructor would help me out of it. Instead, I was tapped for a different position, one requiring much more leadership but virtually no instruction. Initially, I was not thrilled with the choice but I came to really enjoy it and it set me up for three follow-on assignments that have reignited my career and, more importantly, my job satisfaction within the Air Force.

Those follow-on assignments also affected my other intermediate goal, which had been to change my specialty code to formal instructor in order to teach math at the Air Force Academy. At the time of my application, my thinking was that if my Air Force career did not work out then changing my code would have given me some valuable real-world experience in classroom instruction that I could have taken with me to a civilian teaching position. Instead, I had mentors who saw something else in me that I was not sure I had.

It is correct to say that my original goals were not changed by an evolution in thinking but by technical circumstances beyond my control and maybe my original goals can be criticized for their simplicity. But it would be incorrect to assume that my thinking has not changed, that I have not grown during my time in this program. During the last three and a half years, I have had personal notions confirmed and dispelled, I have been introduced to new and exciting concepts, and I have extended my knowledge in many areas. And although I am currently enjoying my time in the Air Force now more than ever, I still answer the question of what I would like to do afterwards as resolutely as ever – I want to bring a love and appreciation for mathematics to others through teaching.