

A Travelogue of the Doctoral Journey of Robert J. Leahy, Jr. in the Doctorate of Education Leadership program at the American College of Education.

The Doctoral and Dissertation Journey

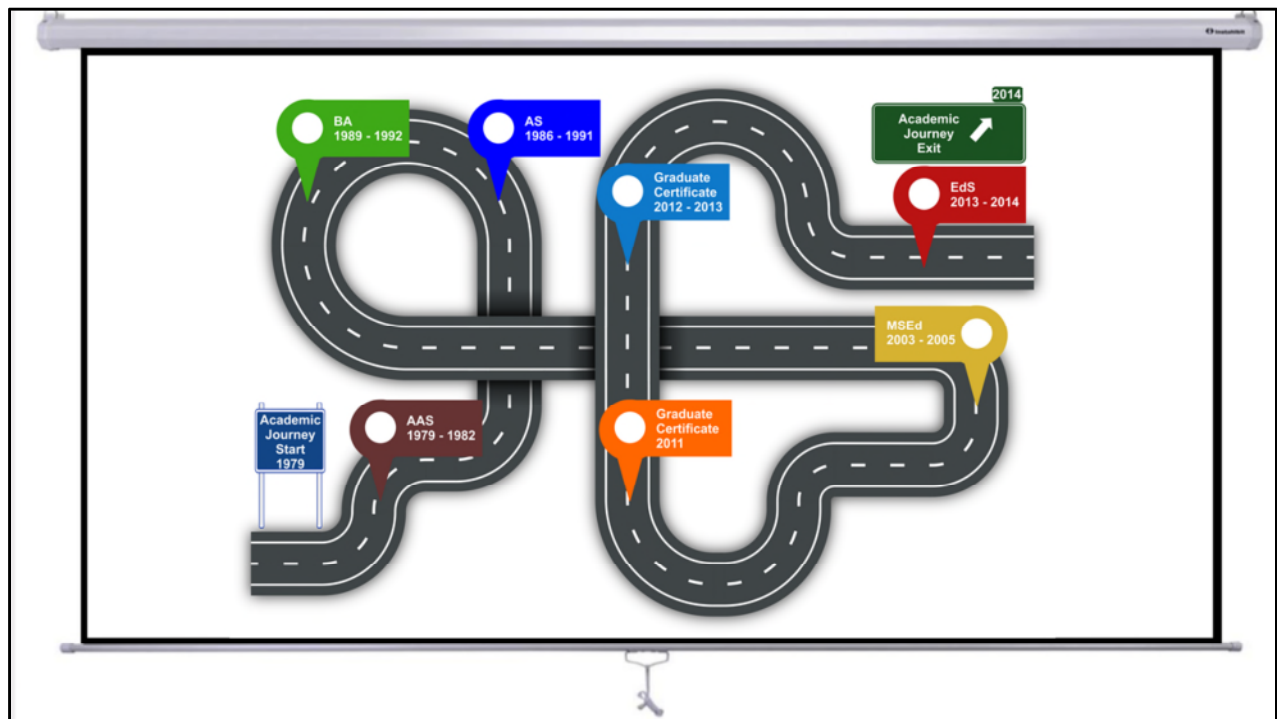
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
(Frost, 2010, p. 10)



In the last stanza of the Robert Frost poem *The Road Not Taken*, published in 1916, it is written:

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

This is my sigh and the road less travelled by.



The road less traveled in this case is the long and winding road I took to the American College of Education doctoral program. I started my college-level education in 1979 and it has continued until 2019. It has been 40 year long journey that hit some bumps and had twists and turns along the way. Each degree or certificate earned on this journey originally were meant to be destinations, but actually became temporary stops instead.

After twenty years in several different career fields, I was looking for a path leading to teaching at the community college level. Initially, the bachelor's degree was enough for me to get one semester as an adjunct. By the end of that semester, the program in which I was teaching was experiencing a declining enrollment and classes were cut the next semester. Since I was the last adjunct brought onboard, I found out that I was not being asked back for the next semester. However a surprise came when I was asked by the program director to apply for a full-time position that was opening up. After the applications and interviews, I found out I was the number two candidate. The program director told me with all else being equal, the number one candidate had a master degree and was offered the position. With that in mind, my education journey began anew to get a masters degree. And this new destination would prove not to be my last.

Each time I achieved a new advanced level of education, it was not enough at that time to land a position in education. The various colleges and universities I applied to had large pools of candidates, and these education institutions wanted candidates with even greater education. I added a couple of graduate certificates to the masters to widen the academic field where I could teach, but they were not enough. In 2012, an Education Specialist degree appeared to be right for my field. It was faster to obtain and more affordable than a doctorate.

The end leads to a new Beginning

- Ed.S. Field Study Committee
 - Encouraged to take topic to new level.
 - Pursue an Ed.D.
- Graduation Ceremony
 - Four Ed.S. were to be conferred, but only one appeared for ceremony.
 - A special hooding ceremony was held.



Robert J. Leahy, Jr., Ed.S. hooded at graduation ceremony (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 2014)

However, the end of my Education Specialist Career & Technical Education degree prompted the beginning of the doctoral degree. After the successful defense of the field study for the Ed.S., one of the committee members made two suggestions. The first suggestion was to take the topic of the study to the next level. The second suggestion was to get into a doctoral program. This Ed.S. was supposed to be a final destination for my graduate-level education. After once again looking for teaching opportunities, it became apparent that doctorate was going to be necessary.

The picture shown is when I was being hooded for the Ed.S. at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonee Wisconsin on December 13, 2014. What made this extra special was that I was the only person being conferred an Ed.S. at that ceremony. It was also the highest degree conferred that year. The school had started its first cohort for the new Doctorate in Education program in October 2014.

The Doctoral Journey

- October 2016 to August 2019
- Emergency Preparedness Training Perceptions of K-12 School Personnel: A Quantitative Cross-Sectional Study of Two Illinois School Districts
- Successful defense = Ed.D.
- Too late for the commencement ceremony on July 27, 2019 (American College of Education, 2019)




Figure 1: Graduation regalia
(Herff Jones, 2019)

My doctoral journey began the October term of 2016 at the American College of Education. Being part of the Ed.S. to Ed.D. Pathway Completion Program, my last scheduled term begins in July 2019 and ends in August. In this last term, I will assemble, present and defend my dissertation titled Emergency Preparedness Training Perceptions of K-12 School Personnel: A Quantitative Cross-Sectional Study of Two Illinois School Districts.

After successful defense of the dissertation, I will be conferred with the Doctor of Education in Leadership. Unfortunately, the American College of Education holds only one commencement ceremony per year. For 2019, it will be held on July 27, 2019. Doctoral students must have successfully defended their dissertation at least 30 days prior to commencement. The timing is off for me to attend the ceremony. But the most important thing to me is receiving the diploma and title of doctor.

Dissertation Journey Metaphor

- A marathon through a minefield with the runner defusing mines along the way.
- Pacing “gets the runner to the finish line” (Black, 2012, p. 102).
- Do not overextend.
- Use time management.
- Identify and diffuse mines.
- Seek help and advice from others including instructors, dissertation chairperson and fellow classmates.



The doctoral journey is not for the faint of heart. In the last seminar class I attended, I was asked the question during a discussion session “Of all the metaphors used to describe a doctoral program, which do you feel to be the most apt?” My answer may have surprised the instructor, but at least one fellow candidate seemed to appreciate my candor. The metaphor was that the doctoral and dissertation journey is a marathon through a minefield with the runner defusing mines along the way.

In my explanation, I revealed that pacing is necessary because it ““gets the runner to the finish line” (Black, 2012, p. 102). Students and candidates need to pace themselves, not overextend themselves and to use time management judiciously.

The minefield analogy may come from my service in the military, but it is also what I personally experienced on this doctoral journey. Students and candidates need to identify possible mines, foreseen or encountered, as early as possible. Take the appropriate actions to diffuse the mine. This may mean outside work and conversations with an instructor, the program coordinator, a dissertation chairperson, and even fellow classmates. The mines may slow you down, but do not let them distract or derail from your goal.

The Marathon Finish Line



Figure 2: Migliori, S. (2019). Lawrence Cherono of Kenya wins the men's race at the 2019 Boston Marathon [Photograph]. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/2019/04/15/boston-marathon-2019-winners/>

The finish line is within sight. The finishing touches are being made to my dissertation. The defense of the dissertation is on the horizon. Shortly afterwards, Dr. Leahy will be retiring from full-time federal service with the US Department of Veterans Affairs. In semi-retirement I will be looking for that elusive adjunct teaching position. You may ask is this truly the end of my academic journey. I am a lifelong learner and will always find something I want to learn more about. But if you are asking if I will go for a post-doctoral degree, the odds are against that.

I fall back on the lyrics found in the Grateful Dead song Truckin' when asked about this journey. "Sometimes the lights all shinin on me. Other times I can barely see. Lately it occurs to me what a long, strange trip it's been (Garcia, Weir, Lesh, & Hunter, 1970). It has been a long, strange trip and one I have enjoyed.

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