

Dr. Double, Dr. Triple: PhD Project Peer Support in Action

Of the six hundred or so men and women who have earned doctorates with The PhD Project's encouragement (and sometimes more), two became human milestones: Dr. Double and Dr. Triple, the participants who marked the doubling and tripling of the number of minority business professors in the U.S.

Neither Alisha Malloy (Dr. Double) nor Belinda Shipp (Dr. Triple) sought this distinction – it was all a random matter of timing – but unbeknownst to anyone but them, their stories were inextricably linked for years before. Now the tale can be told.

Dr. Double, even before she earned that title, was an unseen behind-the-scenes mentor who repeatedly encouraged her friend Belinda not to give up – helping her to overcome daunting challenges and one day unexpectedly become ... Dr. Triple.

And now, Assistant Professor Dr. Belinda Shipp of North Carolina A&T gratefully acknowledges that she might never have made it through her remarkable, tenacious doctoral studies journey without Dr. Malloy's encouragement.

"I just kept visualizing myself being finished," recalls Dr. Shipp. "Alisha was inspirational to me, and still is."

Buoyed by the boost her friend would deliver in emails, phone calls and at PhD Project Doctoral Student Association meetings, she says, "I told myself, 'I am not giving up.' I knew it was like a balloon – if you let it go, it will rise up and out of sight."



Belinda Shipp (left) and Alisha Malloy (right).

Challenges

Alisha Malloy and Belinda Shipp met at a 1998 PhD Project Doctoral Students Association conference, and became friends after the 2000 conference. At that point, it looked like Belinda, at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, would be the first to earn her cap – she was a year ahead of Alisha at Georgia State, who was eager to soak up every grain of advice she could glean from Belinda.

But within a few years, Belinda encountered major obstacles, both professional and personal. Her son developed medical problems involving frequent doctor and hospital visits, which demanded her steady attention. Her dissertation path, already complicated because her topic of technology staffing strategies straddled the IS and Organizational Behavior fields, required her to take on two co-chairs in a cumbersome, dual-

Dr. Triple's Tips for Beating Challenges in a Ph.D. Program

- Try not to leave your university during your dissertation stage: out of sight, out of mind.
- Do a little piece of work every day
- Set daily, weekly and monthly goals
- When you're tired – do low-priority, non brain-draining tasks
- Know your high-energy times of day and use them for the hardest tasks
- Have a PhD Project mentor or peer to encourage you when you need it

department arrangement.

Finally, her husband, the sole breadwinner, was transferred to a job in Michigan, several hundred miles away, which required frequent travel. Still needing to care intensively for her son, she was forced by circumstance to leave the Milwaukee campus while in the dissertation stage, and work on it from her new home.

"I had to be there for my son," she recalls, "but I kept going at a slower pace. I knew if I could write a little bit, or research a small piece every day, I could do it."

But, she admits, the effort was punishing. "At the time, my son and daughter didn't know anything but the sight of me, bent over writing."

Still, she adds, the boy, seven when she started, and his sister were a motivation and inspiration: "It was important to me that they do well and get into college. I had to show them that you can complete things, and there is an end. If you have a dream, you hang on to it, even when things are tough."

Roles Reverse

As time slipped by for Belinda, Alisha was fortunate to progress along a smoother track in her studies. She glided ahead of her friend (and completed her doctorate). The roles were reversed; the helper became the helped.

And the support covered the personal as well as the academic: Dr. Malloy had experienced

life challenges similar to those her friend was confronting.

By phone and email, and face to face once or twice a year, Dr. Malloy became an important cheerleader, confidante and booster for her friend.

"It became my task to make sure Belinda had someone to talk to," recalls Dr. Malloy. "I kept reminding her there was no option to quit – that it took different times for people to finish, that there was nothing wrong with her, it just wasn't her time yet."

In late September 2007, Belinda Shipps sat in a hallway for 15 minutes, waiting for a meeting room door to open, while her committee debated the merits of the dissertation defense she had just presented. The door opened and she heard the words, "Congratulations, Dr. Shipps."

Even in her most challenging times, Dr. Shipps had frequently teased her friend Alisha about the sobriquet, "Dr. Double."

Dr. Malloy now enjoys many opportunities to return the favor. Today, the two professors live and work just 50 miles apart in North Carolina – Dr. Malloy is an assistant professor at North Carolina Central University and their friendship endures. Not surprisingly, it's a rare meetup when Dr. Malloy passes up the chance to wisecrack about her good friend – The PhD Project's Dr. Triple.

And the son who inspired his mother, the future Dr. Triple, is now 17 and college-bound.



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