

### **Personal and Professional Journey in Higher Education**

One of the primary reasons I choose to pursue a career in higher education is my personal experiences as an Afghan woman. While I am pursuing a master's degree in education, women and girls in other parts of the world are not given the opportunity to pursue their dreams of education and are deprived of their basic rights. Growing up within this reality shaped my early understanding of the transformative power of education and deepened my appreciation for the opportunities it can create. I got my undergraduate degree in Education, during which much of my academic and professional work focused on supporting girls' access to education. I also worked with nonprofit organizations advocating for the rights of women and girls. These experiences significantly shaped my understanding of education as a powerful tool for access, empowerment, and social transformation. For me, pursuing a master's degree in Higher Education is not only a personal achievement but also a reflection of access, opportunity, and empowerment.

My personal experiences have strengthened my commitment to supporting students, particularly those from historically marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds who may face structural, cultural, or personal barriers in accessing and navigating higher education. As a future higher education professional, I aspire to contribute to creating inclusive environments where all students feel valued, supported, and empowered to achieve their academic and personal goals, regardless of their identity or background. In terms of my philosophy in higher education, I believe that colleges and universities serve as transformative spaces where students develop not only academic knowledge and professional skills but also identity, purpose, and a sense of civic and social responsibility. Higher education plays a critical role in fostering holistic student

development and preparing individuals to engage meaningfully with their communities and society. This belief is closely aligned with what I have learned through student development theory. During my first semester, I took a class in college student development, which helped me understand that student success extends beyond academic achievement. Student development theories emphasize the interconnectedness of cognitive, psychosocial, emotional, and identity development, including frameworks such as psychosocial development, cognitive development, holistic development, and social identity development. Engaging with these theories has deepened my understanding of student needs and has informed me how I approach program design, policy development, and the creation of supportive learning environments. These frameworks have been particularly meaningful in shaping my professional practice.

In my current role working with International Support Services, I have noticed how transition experiences significantly influence students' sense of belonging, confidence, and persistence. International students navigate complex academic, cultural, and social adjustments, often while managing isolation and identity-related challenges. This experience has reinforced my belief that student affairs professionals must provide not only information and resources, but also care, advocacy, empathy, and culturally responsive support. Overall, my professional philosophy is grounded in the belief that our role in higher education extends beyond helping academic success. It also involves supporting students as they navigate institutional systems, discover their strengths, develop their identities, and realize their full potential. As a future higher education professional, I am committed to fostering educational environments that reflect the transformative power of education and affirm that every student deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and belong.