

Finishing What You Started

By: Marc Lachance

When I was a senior in high school, I still did not know what I wanted to be when I was older. All I knew is that I wanted to be involved in sports. I originally thought that I wanted to be in sports management but the local hockey team that I had been a season ticket holder for since I was nine, was just sold and was moving to Peoria, Illinois. I learned that working in minor league sports was not a stable profession. I wanted to be more than just a salesperson. I wanted to be a positive role model who made a difference in others lives. In the spring semester, everything became clearer with two life changing opportunities. First, I signed up to have a school to career internship with my physical education teacher. During the last few months of the school year, I helped with getting the equipment ready, taking attendance and learning what it would be like to be a physical education teacher. My mentor was also the boy's varsity basketball coach. He said that being a teacher at the high school allowed him the time after school to let him coach. He said that coaching was a lot like teaching physical education because he was able to teach the students more than just the physical skills. Sports can also teach how to live a healthy lifestyle, how to work as a team, communicate with each other and how to work out differences. At the same time, I also landed a job with the after-school program at the local elementary school. Most afternoons, I would play games with the students or would watch the varsity baseball team play with a group of students. I enjoyed both opportunities so much that I knew that I wanted to become a physical education teacher so that I could help students learn some of these lifetime skills.

In the spring of 2013, I decided that I wanted to continue my education by attaining a master's degree. I was in my third year of being an Instructional Assistant at the high school that I graduated from and was sending out applications for physical education jobs with little luck. Even though I did

not need to have my degree until after my fifth year of actually teaching, I wanted to get a head start. I began my search for a program that would fit with my busy schedule, would challenge me and at the same time match well with my Bachelor of Science in Movement Science from Westfield State University. A simple search on the web brought me to two programs that met my criteria. After looking at the program requirements for each and seeing that Michigan State University (MSU) has constantly been ranked in U.S. News & World Report as one of the Best Online Education programs, it was an easy decision.

Michigan State University's Master of Arts in Education (MAED) program was the perfect fit for me. I had previously taken a few online classes and liked how they were set up. The program was entirely online which let me complete my work at my own pace. Although I would not be taking any classes in East Lansing, I actually visited the campus while taking my first course so I could get to know what Michigan State was all about. I walked in some of the academic buildings but since it was summer, there was not that much activity on campus. Being into sports like I am, I made sure to visit Spartan Stadium, Munn Ice Arena and the Breslin Center, a place where I would eventually walk across the stage to receive my placeholder diploma in the spring of 2017. It was a beautiful campus and I wished I had the time and resources to spend a year out in Michigan to complete my degree.

Not only did the degree offer flexibility with its time constraints, it also had a variety of classes in each of the concentrations. My primary concentration was in Sports Coaching and Leadership which built off the knowledge that I gained during my undergraduate studies. I learned a lot in the four courses in this area and was able to transfer what I learned over to my physical education and coaching positions. My second concentration would be in Online Teaching and Learning. In the past, the majority of the classes that I was enrolled in were common core or physical education teacher preparation. I saw this as an opportunity to learn in an area that was outside my comfort zone and considered it a challenge. By taking three courses in each concentration, I would gain graduate certificates in each. In total, there were ten courses that I needed to receive my Master's degree. I was

able to take something away from each of them but looking back, some courses I was able to grow as a learner more than other. This synthesis essay will demonstrate how I was able to complete some of the MSU's learning outcomes in a few of my favorite classes.

The first learning outcome that I demonstrated was exercising leadership. Leadership comes in many styles. I am currently the head coach of the Westfield State University's men's club hockey team. When applying for admission into the MAED program, I needed to write a personal goal essay. In my essay, I talked about how I wanted to become an athletic director. In Legal and Administration Issues of Coaching (KIN 854), I learned about everything that a coach or administrator is responsible for both on and off the field. Being a coach is more than just worrying about tryouts, practice plans and games. Coaches also need to worry about making sure players arrive safely, that players are safe in the locker room areas and that there is no hazing. As a coach, I feel that I am doing my job in those areas. We also studied various moot cases about those responsibilities and learned about negligence and liability. We created several projects such as emergency action plans, anti-hazing contracts and a year round calendar with time lines for each of the sports that our school offered. When I look at the calendar, I feel comfortable handling issues in the sports that I am familiar with such as football, soccer, hockey and baseball. However, as an athletic director, you need to be knowledgeable in all sports. I have no experience with swimming, wrestling or gymnastics.

When reflecting on my goals in the Capstone Seminar (ED 870), I changed my goal to become a general manager for the club hockey team. The winter season is a busy season with basketball, swimming and gymnastics happening at the same time as hockey. Being a general manager will let me focus on only one sport, a sport that I have expertise in. I handle some of the administrative issues for the team already but becoming a general manager will let me expand on some of my responsibilities. I really enjoy some of the off the ice duties. As I have said before, one of my main goals is to make a difference in others lives. One event that I have established is an annual Veteran's Day fundraiser game against Norwich University to help raise money for local military families. I would like to continue to

find new ways to have my players be involved in the community so that they can become future leaders.

Another learning outcome that I was able to achieve is that I was able to introduce a new practice into my work place. In Learning Technology Through Design (CEP 817), I was able to create a database that hosted our student's fitness scores online. I was able to use this as my professional learning goal for the 2016-17 school year. This database allows us to record fitness scores each semester and track students progress over time. We created it in a Google Sheet which allows us to calculate any improvements that the students make and averages for each grade. Another good thing about it being on Google is that once a grade has moved on to the next school, other physical education teachers in the district would be able to access the database to see continue growth.

This was my first year in my new school and it was good to be able to contribute a new idea. This is an idea that my coworker has always wanted to do but did not know how to get started. I was able to work with my coworker through each of the stages of design: empathize, define, ideate, prototype and test. I learned a lot about the design process and that even after you go through the cycle once, that you probably won't have a finished product. We've entered the scores for the first year as a test but will continue to use techniques learned in CEP 817, such as surveys and brainstorming, so that we can make small improvements to our prototype.

The third learning outcome that I achieved in the MAED program was that I am able to use digital tools for communication, collaboration and presentation. The Capstone Seminar (ED 870) was a unique course. The major project in the course, the electronic portfolio, was also the final project in the program. It allowed us to reflect on our time at Michigan State, show future employers what we have to offer and take a look into our future learning plans. It summed up everything that I wanted in an education program: I could work at my own pace, it allowed me to relate it to my professional work and at times, it was a challenge. I am fortunate that the instructors let me work ahead with it being a busy time during the summer semester. The class was convenient. I was able to complete the modules

on my own time. This allowed me to pass in my best work and not feel rushed.

The class worked as individuals but I feel like I made the most connections with my peers in this class because we used a program called Flipgrid. Flipgrid posts allowed us to create three minute videos where we would communicate with our peers. In the posts we would describe what we worked on during each module and ask for feedback. We would also give feedback to two peers each week. It seemed like each week I was connecting with new students. In other courses in the program, we would communicate through discussion boards. Having the responses in video form made the posts feel more personal. We had set assignments that we needed to have in our portfolio but we were also asked to add three pieces of flair to make ours unique. I decided to create an about me section so that employers could learn a little bit about me outside the classroom, a cover letter to go with my resume and a professional development grid. The portfolio was a lot of work but it is something that I will update and use in my future.

In conclusion, as I put the finishing touches on my electronic portfolio for my final exhibition, I have realized how much I have grown in the past four years. I've grown by showing leadership by introducing new ideas, that I am able to use digital tools to collaborate and that I can learn through different digital interactions. I am able to take away something from each of the ten courses. I know that just because I will have received my master's degree that I am not going to stop learning. It is just another milestone on a continuous path of education. I am not sure exactly where the path will lead me but I do know that after I have a little time off to relax and reflect, that I will be back to challenge myself to be the best that I can be. I want to thank everyone at Michigan State from the professors to my peers for never letting me settle or get complacent. They have pushed me to be a better educator and make the most out of the opportunities that I have been given.