

Personal Statement – 05/26/2021

Describe your personal and professional growth throughout your Master's degree program.

The path of my Master's Degree program is fairly unconventional, so there can be two answers to this question – 1) my growth from when I began graduate work back in 1994 and 2) growth that occurred as I finished my program here at UW Stevens Point over the last year.

During the 1994-1995 timeframe, I took 35 credits from the UW-Whitewater, 18 of them as graduate credit to complete a 6-12 grade teaching license program as a Middle/Secondary English teacher. This program, while excellent, did not have a direct path to a Master's degree, so I did not complete my degree and I only completed the teaching certification. Fast-forward 26 years after a fruitful career in Information Technology at a variety of levels, I decided that it was time to “check that box” and finally complete my Master's degree. I started in the Summer of 2020 and was able to complete the requirements this May 2021.

Obviously, in the first case, my personal and professional growth has been immense since I first started the program back in the mid-nineties. I have matured as a person and from a career perspective, enduring many trials and toils along the way. For me, Education has been a “parallel career track” as it has not yet been my primary career, or the one in which I have spent the most time. However, throughout the last 27 years, I have been able to serve as Adjunct Faculty a few times, serve as facilitator for significant IT related events and discussions, and taught in various volunteer capacities. With the completion of my Master's degree, it is now time for me to make a career pivot and transition toward a path where Education takes a more primary role in my career. While I am still determining what this will specifically look like, I will be focusing on an Adult Education emphasis.

In the second case (which is the one in which you likely have the most interest), I have grown personally and professionally in significant ways here at the UW Stevens Point Master's program. Personally, by studying and bringing educational principles to the forefront, I have validated my desire to make a change in my career and pivot it toward a career of helping others. In my curriculum, I learned the critical roles that both Mindsets and Resilience play as we decide, prepare for, and execute changes. I fully intend to use these growth lessons as I execute my next change. In addition, I have grown substantially in my knowledge and understanding of the principles of Sustainability and what the term Educational Sustainability can mean for me. During my 1 year at UW Stevens Point, I experienced several health issues, including having a bad reaction to a radiation treatment for my skin cancer, and testing positive for both Covid and a pulmonary blood clot because of that Covid. While both situations were quite difficult, my ability to stay engaged with the academic material helped me see in a very applied way how important the ethics of sustainable care is if we are to live a healthy and vital life. My own personal growth has often happened through hardship, and the coincidence of my health challenges with my UWSP program is no exception. It is a case of making the academic real, and the real aligned with the academic.

From the career perspective, my journey through the UWSP Education Master's program is also slightly unconventional. Since I am not currently a teacher and come to the program with a 27-year background in Information Technology, my career growth is perhaps more forward looking than others in the program. I have been discussing the "career pivot" language for several years before I entered UWSP as a student, but this Master's Program allowed me to more explicitly make those statements to my student and professor colleagues and explore what such a path could look like in the context of Education. In addition, there were certain curricula and projects that I could apply toward my growth in my current role as an IT Project Manager. In one of my Sustainability classes where I learned about the Care Framework, I created a Trauma Sensitive Project Management Framework that can be the basis of a sound, innovative approach to project management. Had I not taken that class, I would not have understood Trauma Sensitive or Care principles and would not have been challenged to think of how they can be applied to my current work. I also learned about the principles of good research and was able to perform research on an actual online course that my wife and I created to gain insight into best practices and the things that are important in delivering such coursework. I have also grown in my career as an entrepreneur as a result of this program. I am owner or co-owner of a couple of family businesses located in Stevens Point, and participating in this Master's degree program provided a deeper connection to the UW Stevens Point community that I had ever had before. It revealed to me the places in my own Entrepreneurial life that have a gap, and how much I am missing a close connection to academic and professional networks and communities of practice. As I consider the next steps of my pivot, I will make growth-oriented choices about how I wish to engage with UWSP and other universities globally, so that I can develop a healthy robust community relationship and continue to grow.

Completing the Master's program at UW Stevens Point was an exceptionally good choice for me. It provided me the structure I needed to re-engage with the academic community after such a long time away, and the flexibility I needed as a full-time working adult with a family and entrepreneurial duties. As my diploma is delivered and I finally have a Master's in Education credential in hand, I sincerely hope it will open opportunities in learning, education, training and development and other careers I do not know the names of yet, that were previously closed to me. Even though I am an older career changer, I am very optimistic about my future as I put together the great combination of long work experience and a 2021-fresh graduate degree in Education from a top-rated university. My personal and professional growth over this past year is both meaningful and incredibly important to me and where I currently am in my life. Thank you to everyone who reads this for your part in walking alongside me on my journey.

Take care,

Dave Scheer