

Why Change What Has Been Successful

By: Gary Koskinen

Two years ago when I was deciding where to start working on a Master's Degree, I contemplated multiple different universities in order to get the most out of the experience. I wanted to go to a university where I would get meaning and help with teaching, not just get a Masters to increase pay at my school-it is a perk though. I debated the issues of working in a program that was in person or completely online, and what university would be best for me. I decided to stay with [Michigan State University](#), because the online courses gave me the ability to work at my pace. Throughout this program I have been involved in planning a wedding, coaching basketball, and working a summer job, while also working a full-time teaching job. Michigan State University's undergraduate program allowed me the opportunity to be prepared for a full-time teaching job not only with education, but with opportunities. The summer after I graduated I had over 20 interviews in Michigan, which is where I wanted to stay and I heard from multiple interview committees that part of it was because I graduated from Michigan State. I knew my decision to stay with Michigan State would never be questioned after I started the program.

When I was accepted into the [Masters of Arts in Education](#) program I had to decide a focus. I decided not to focus on either Teaching Math or Science, because I took both Math and Science teaching classes in my undergraduate program. I wanted to choose a topic that both interested me and would be very useful. I debated between Coaching and Sports Leadership, Technology, or Administration. I have always loved sports and have wanted to coach my whole life, so I chose Coaching and Sports Leadership. I had some really amazing coaches growing up and some not so amazing coaches. I wanted to better myself as a coach in order to get the full potential out of my athletes by developing them into not only athletes but great people. Even though I did

not choose Technology I still wanted to take as many electives in this field as I could because technology is never going away, it is only changing and developing into new things. I knew that MSU would allow me to work with the latest and greatest software programs that will be most useful to incorporate into teaching. I did not choose Administration because I love the student interactions on a daily basis and some administrators have said that you spend a lot more time with the students that get in trouble than with the student body as a whole. Now it is was time to let the Coaching and Sports Leadership begin!

My experience with teaching and my Master's program started when I spent a school year interning with a mentor teacher. The course was called *Intern Teaching Diverse Learners II (TE 502)*. This course allowed me the ability to transition into the day to day life of a teacher for a ten week period. In the ten weeks, I planned all of the activities and lessons taught to both a Chemistry and Extended Advanced Algebra class with the help of my mentor teacher. Not only did my mentor teacher guide me through this process, but she was also available to bounce ideas off of. From this experience I learned a lot of important lessons about myself as a teacher. To this day I have not been able to plan out a day-to-day syllabus for a unit like my mentor teacher did for the students. While I appreciated the fact that my mentor was able to make and adhere to a structured day-to-day schedule for a particular unit, I am unable to do this because the 2013-2014 school year will be my fourth year. I find it is harder to stick to such a structured schedule, because I do not know how many extra days a unit will need yet, but I hope to someday know the number of extra days needed for each unit.

My first Coaching and Leadership course was *Physical Bases of Coaching (KIN 856)* with George Harnick. This course taught me many different aspects of coaching with respect to the development of athletes and how to keep an athlete healthy. I learned that while I was growing up I

did things incorrectly that were not really helping me, like static stretching instead of dynamic stretching or the diet I had before and after a game. [KIN 856](#) made me do so many different things that I have written about in other places on this site, but one of the most unique things we did was to make a professional network. The professionals had to be near the area of where we coach so we could refer a student-athlete to someone if they didn't have a professional in mind already. The list of professionals include exercise physiologist, biomechanics technician, sports nutritionists, strength and conditioning specialist, ophthalmologist, physical therapist, athletic trainer, massage therapist, chiropractor, dentist, orthopedic medical doctor, and a general practitioner doctor. Talking with the sports nutritionist gave me a good idea where to start when it came to our assignment of developing recovery meal options for my student-athletes after physical activity. These recovery meals will help to replenish the nutrients that the athletes lose, and I will be passing it out to my athletes next school year.

To keep with the coaching focus and considering I have had some interest to become an Athletic Director at a high school the next course was perfect for me. [Sports Law for Coaching and Administrators \(KIN 854\)](#) provided me with the opportunity to learn the sports law and apply the law to select situations. Topics on hazing, discrimination, employment opportunities, negligence, contracts, and ways to prevent injuries in your facilities were a few covered in the class. The instructor, Rick Atkinson, gave us example Court Cases and asked us how we would interpret the case with respect to the laws we were learning. In the interpretation we had to pick a side and defend why we felt the way we did. Along with defending our side we were asked how this incident could be prevented in the future. This course greatly increased my knowledge of not only sports law, but law in general. I also learned that the person's interpretation of the law and the situation has a lot to do with their perception of the issue. Since in most schools in this area the Athletic

Director doubles as an Assistant Principal this is why I contemplated going for the Administration focus of this master's program.

The technology elective that I chose to take was [Teaching Students Online \(CEP 820\)](#) with Sandra Sawaya. I chose this course because there are a lot of new online schools for students and I have had home bound students that I had to send paper copies home for them, but this way they could log in and get the same material. One thing we had to do for this class is keep a Google Doc for a [Developer Notebook](#), where I would answer questions and write responses to prompts. Then within a few days I would get feedback back from Sandra. There were 2 really important experiences I gained from this course. They are that to teach a Chemistry course completely online takes a lot of time to develop the lesson due to the fact that there would be no face-to-face interaction. Chemistry needs a lot of discussion forums for the students to share ideas and get feedback quickly so they know they are doing it correctly or so they do not keep going down the wrong path. The other important experience is the ability to have time to work with Moodle. The Troy School District allows access for teachers to use Moodle, but I have never had the time to train with the software and this class gave me that ability. Once I am completely done with this program I have every intention to keep updating Moodle to have all of the units on Moodle. It will probably take me a few years, but at least now I have a place to start from. I really enjoyed in [CEP 820](#), like [ED 870](#), the time I am taking to make a website can be used beyond the limitations of the courses. I do not plan on having to apply to a new school district, but both of these websites would be very useful in an interview process.

During this program I ran into two major snags in the courses, which just made me work harder to get through them. The first was [KIN 856](#), one of the first units requires to know the bones of the body and have the ability to explain an exercise correctly instead of saying put your

“right shoulder forward with your elbow bent”, it had to be “abduction of the right shoulder with flexion at the right elbow”. The second major snag I came across was in [CEP 820](#), because I am teaching the subject and unit in a traditional class setting and this course was asking me to think that the online part would be the main interaction. It took a couple discussions with the instructor to get on the right page but in the end I figured it out. At first I thought I could develop the resources to be supplemental for the class, but that wouldn’t go with the title of Teaching Students Online. Sandra gave me a great suggestion of think of it as a flipped classroom. The students learn the material outside the classroom and when they come to you it is time for homework, studying, and labs. This really helped me change my approach to how I needed to think for this class.

The Masters of Arts in Education program at Michigan State has given me the ability and opportunities to learn how to use new material and has given me time to develop material that I can use in not only my classroom, but also help others in the school get set-up. I have talked with teacher colleagues who are going through programs at other universities. They said the material is not practical for what they want to get out of it. This is one of the reasons why I came back to Michigan State. My undergraduate education classes, for the most part, gave us techniques we could use in our classes. It was harder for me because most of the material used was from Biology, but the instructors did do a good job trying to tie in all subjects.

How do you measure success in education? There are so many possibilities when your education gets you into the field of education. For example, you could compare just having a job and how well you do your job. My [Bachelor of Arts in Chemistry](#) from Michigan State University allowed me to be successful in finding a job once I finished my student internship. Once I had some experience one of the best school districts in the State of Michigan hired me to teach Chemistry to their students. This is all because of the education I received from Michigan State

University. Now after getting my Masters of Arts in Education from Michigan State University, I feel that the program increased my knowledge in teaching, coaching, and building new technology into my classroom. What made this program successful? It all starts with the instructors of the course. I especially found this out in CEP 820, because if the course is not set-up properly learning will not occur. The instructors provided feedback on assignments so that I was able to make corrections for the next assignments. The online experience was definitely the best choice for me. I wanted to be done by the fall of 2013, and remain coaching throughout the program. The online program gave me a chance to work with material that will be practical to me in my teaching. Other examples that have not been previously mentioned are developing an athletic program, how to deal with a decompetitor, and seeing how a new reader starts the process of interpretation. I also may have to take the approach from "The Girl With the Brown Crayon" and record my lectures in class so I know what I teach each class. I have 5 sections of Chemistry for the 2013-2014 school year. If I had gotten nothing out of this program, which is not true, the technology introduced to me in the final semester of this program would have made this whole program worthwhile for me!

Was this program successful in developing me into a better coach and educator? YES!!