

It's Almost Over: The Synthesis of My Master of Arts in Education Degree

Ever since I was first admitted into the Masters Program at Michigan State University, I have looked at it as a great opportunity for me to fulfil the goals I have set for myself once I graduated with my undergrad degree. Although, I have made it through the program, it was not always easy. From the very beginning I was facing adversity and pressure to complete the degree because I was one of the few students that was placed on probationary acceptance, and needed to prove myself to be fully accepted into the program. So from the very start I had the pressure of making the grades in order to continue at Michigan State. That was in January of 2014, and by the end of the summer session, I had completed my requirements to be fully accepted and no here I am, a few months away from graduation. This program has not only challenged me academically to broaden my mind and become a better educator and coach, but it has also made me grow as an adult, being able to focus on balancing school and work, especially during the season.

One of the biggest struggles I have faced over the years was being driven academically, especially in college where I was a member of the football team and taking a full course load at the same time. During that time, I did not find it too difficult to balance my course work and football activities to be able to pass classes. It was not until I graduated that I realised that my lack of drive in undergrad would impact my chances at graduate schools. As I mentioned before I was a probationary student at the beginning of my degree with MSU and it was this program that has helped to inspire the drive in me to truly succeed academically. I was typically all right with just doing enough work to get by and stay eligible to play football and that was it. This degree program has pushed me to not settle for that style of mediocrity, but to truly take the information I am learning and turn it into something useful that will help me with the work that I am doing.

Another area that I have really developed into a strong asset through this program is my ability for time management. While I was in college it was not difficult to balance my course work with football schedule because I had plenty of time to handle both, but once I joined the world of coaching football most of my free time vanished. I was now balancing the roles of a position coach and countless other duties, all while having to manage my time to complete online courses. A big struggle I feared when joining the program was how I was going to handle my free time while taking online courses and not having to actually go to a classroom for my classes. I was able to go outside my comfort zone and not procrastinate as much as I used to in college, and truly began to balance my time to get my school work done in a timely manner so that I was not doing school work in the office during the day, or allowing it to interfere with the many jobs I have to accomplish while being a coach. Being able to manage my time between school and work has made me more aware of how much time I really have in a day, and being able to schedule everything so that it gets done promptly has become a huge asset to me as a coach and educator because I now have the ability to balance my schedule so that I am not scrambling at the last minute for everything.

With my values and abilities being strengthened in the degree of how I was able to balance my time and find a drive to succeed more than just get by, it was the

classes that really helped to transform who I am as a coach and educator. There were multiple courses throughout my degree with MSU that really helped to develop my style of coaching and opened my eyes to many things I never truly realized before now. I had the opportunity to take courses that dealt with sports administration, coaching, and the development of players and other courses, which focused on leadership, and the concepts of student development to help them succeed in the future. These course all have opened my eyes as to what can truly be accomplished when coaches and educators truly focus on what they are doing and how their roles as leaders affect the students and players.

One of the first courses I took in the spring 2014 semester was **KIN 856: Legal and Administrative Issues for Administrators and Coaches** this course was based around the legal representation administrators have for the sports programs in their schools. It was the first sports based class I took in the program and it was an eye opener because I had been working as a football coach for only about 4 months at this point and I never realized how much more there was to my job on the legal side of what I was doing. This course helped to open my eyes to the liability issues and concerns athletic departments have to face when involved with student-athletes and while hosting events. It made me begin to think about everything I do with my players and how their safety is a key importance in everything we do. It made me really begin to think about the drills I ran and how they can help to prevent injury for the players. This course gave me the opportunity to think like an athletic director and begin to see things from an experienced eye in how certain things can be run or changed to improve the safety of all parties involved. The course helped to transform me more into a coach than a former player who is new to coaching and just does everything I was told to do. I became more objective in what we were trying to do and began to see how things could be done for the best interest of the team and coaching staff.

During the summer 2014 semester I had the opportunity to take a course based on what it means to be a learner, **EAD 801: Leadership and Organizational Development** really helped me to realize how much more there was to being a leader, than someone who is just placed in a leadership role. As a coach I knew I was to be a leader to the players I worked with, as someone who they can talk to and learn from, but I never truly understood what that meant until I took this course. I honestly never thought about what it meant to be a leader other than being the guy on the team to try and uplift his teammates in times of need. I was able to focus on how many different types of leaders there were and how each had a specific role in their organization. I grew as a leader for my players because I was able to realize that in order to earn the respect of leader, I would have to give the players the same respect in return to build the trust necessary for our relationships to grow properly. I grew as a leader within my group of players because the trust I was able to build after demonstrating some of the traits I learned in this course.

The next few courses I learned a lot from came back to the concepts of coaching and how they affect the players on and off the field. In **KIN 855: Psychological Basis of Coaching** I was able to focus on the abilities of a coach from a psychological standpoint. It was quite in depth on how coaching styles are capable of affecting the players and their abilities. This course was very in depth in some of

the psychological tricks that coaches could use to motivate their players more, or even get the players to understand what needed to be done. I found it extremely interesting because I took this course during the season so I was able to use some of my work (i.e. imagery scripts, player development plans, etc.) to see the effects they would have on players, while also receiving their feedback on if it worked for them or not. I was able to better understand how important the psychological aspects of the game are for the players, and how for some all it takes is a visual image for them to understand, while others need to actually perform the task to understand why it is done that way. I grew a lot as a coach being able to better understand how the players were able to think about what I was teaching them, and was able to learn some tricks on how to help them better understand it.

In **KIN 857: Promoting Youth Development in Sports** I was able to see how important it is for coaches, parents and educators to positively allow children to take hold of sports and grow into them, instead of being forced into them. This course was built around helping me realize how important the developmental stages of sports relates to the developmental stages of life that have been established for generations. Each level of development must have a specific step included in how the player develops. Being a college football coach I have the opportunity to deal with athletes that are reaching their peak of athletic ability and had to realise that the largest struggle is keeping the game of football, simply just a game. I was able to see how my coaching abilities were tested in making sure that the players I work with are not burning themselves out from over work in hopes to get better because at the end of the day it is just a game, and for a lot of players at this level it becomes a negative concept and a lot of players leave from the stress. I have done what I can to make sure the game stays a positive influence on their life to make them better people for when they are no longer able to turn to football as an outlet.

From the moment I found out that I would have the opportunity to carry out my graduate work at Michigan State University, I have been thrilled to be a Spartan, and prove that I belong to be a full member of the Education program here. During my time in this program I have grown into a better coach and leader for my players on and of the field. I feel I have developed into a more rounded coach that has been able to better develop a player, not only on the field, but also in the classroom for when they no longer have football. I have grown into an adult who is able to better balance my time to make myself more effective as an employee and someone to work with. I have also found a drive within myself that helps me strive for a better overall product, rather than just being able to get by with what is acceptable, which in turn sets a higher standard for my players to follow. It is actually hard to believe that in a short amount of time it will all be over and the journey of my Masters Degree will be complete and I will be on my next journey in my coaching career. It's almost over.