The Next Chapter: Embracing Future Learning Opportunities

Matthew Shaw, Michigan State University

"The only obstacle to learning is you. Opportunities are plentiful, embrace them."

- Anonymous

So often in our structured education system, there is an assumption that once students complete a course, that they have mastered the content/skills to move on to the next subject. However, through a deeper dive into learning, we understand that mastery comes through experience and that learning is not complete at the end of an academic term. Student understanding grows exponentially as we, the learners, seek to build on our learning and continue to grow. Through my time at Michigan State University, I have used each course as a building block towards future learning, in an attempt to relate concepts from my previous courses to help strengthen my current understanding. As my chapter of learning at MSU comes to a close, I will continue to build on the foundation of knowledge learned as I continue in my professional career in the field of higher education. My future goals focus on defining the student record as a reflection of student learning, the integration of Canvas learning management system (LMS) into a University-wide setting, and further understanding the management element within higher education to effectively navigate a decentralized campus population. These are all areas that I dabbled with in MSU assignments, but now will be able to tackle on a larger scale in professional practice.

In designing my portfolio, I noticed a common theme begin to take shape: the interest and desire to improve the student record as a reflection of student learning. The emphasis on student reflection, through the use of electronic portfolios, course reflections, scholarship records and learning objectives, allows the students' educational records to be outcome-oriented and focused on what the student learned. The current landscape of educational records is defined by paper transcripts and diplomas, both of which identify line-item accomplishments, with no distinguishing characteristics amongst students besides the students' names. As I move forward in my career, I want students to be able to not only remember their learning but use the collection of digital artifacts as a foundation to build upon once a degree is conferred. In an ever-growing competitive job market, employers sift through hundreds of transcripts and GPAs; my goal is to assist students in separating themselves from the thousands of other graduating students with impressive GPAs. The desire to design a more

expansive 'student record' (in which the original transcripts and diploma could reside) will allow students to continually reflect on their learning during their academic career while also providing students the option to present this collection as a representation of their learning. With this goal in mind, I've inquired about becoming more involved with Stanford's [Scholarship Record](#) initiative, which focuses on integrating course learning objectives as demonstration of student learning – a small step in shifting towards a more descriptive representation of student learning than a course subject, number and grade on a transcript. The Scholarship Record initiative, housed in the Office of the University Registrar (my current department), would allow me to build on the skills learned in MSU's capstone portfolio course and highlight the key components that students could integrate into their own records moving forward.

Tying into the student records component, Stanford University will be expanding the use of the [Canvas](#) learning management system (LMS) to a campus-wide audience [within the next year](#). As I had heard this was a possibility, I focused my [electronic portfolio/course reflection assignment](#) on the Canvas LMS system to understand the application's tools and functionality. My goal moving forward is to now put learning into practice in instructional design, an area I am highly interested in. In collaboration with the Vice Provost of Teaching & Learning (VPTL), I aim to build on my prior design knowledge of the application and similar LMS features that engage students and instructors within a single digital location. Thanks to the design courses at MSU, I understand that the first iteration will never be the perfect product, and that failure is only a measure of future successes. Our course designs, electronic portfolios, and systems setup will start with understanding the needs of the students and instructors, as we proceed to prototypes and testing. I look forward to the challenge of being a part of the Canvas campus integration team, and have made my interest vocal to senior management as being the representative for the Office of the University Registrar. An enormous challenge lies ahead, but the LMS integration is one I look forward to tackling, and I am comfortable with knowing our designs will be a constant cycle of development as we consider the needs of students, faculty and staff.

In outlining my goals for design and educational technology integration, I also aim to build on the elements of interpersonal skills and management development. As I learned through my coursework at MSU, the goal of educational technology integration is not to simply promote the technologies, but rather adapt these applications and tools to the needs of the learner. The Master's program was as much about understanding the human element and empathizing with our learners, as it was about the

theories and practice in design. Similarly, as I move forward with my career in the educational technology field, I want to continue my empathy development in a management role on a decentralized Stanford campus. How do I better understand the needs and perspectives of both my staff and close constituents on campus? How do I incorporate their product needs into a LMS or Scholarship Record application to ensure the release of a successful product to students, faculty and staff? To help assist with these questions and expand my understanding of management strategies, I have enrolled in a three-month long [Manager's Academy course](#) to begin in late Summer 2015. My goal is to build on the concepts I've learned both at MSU and in practice as a manager over the last six months at Stanford, to better assist, understand and educate my colleagues on campus.

My time at Michigan State University is nearing its end, but the skills learned have set the foundation for future learning in my career. I look forward to embracing future learning opportunities and the challenges that lie ahead as we continue towards a digital shift in higher education.