Individualized Learning Plan

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Within the next five years, there will be many changes in my professional life. Although I am still working on finding myself and exactly where I belong within the Instructional Design field, I currently see myself either as a freelance Instructional Designer or as a UX Designer. I don't want to close myself off to opportunities that may arise.

The Next 5 Years

I first became interested in Instructional Design Technology through my current position as the Human Trafficking Prevention Specialist at Prince William County Public Schools. I began working on making various presentations for community presentations because those are different than our student presentations. I started to realize that I didn't really know *how* to properly make any online training courses and I was considering having one designed for community members. My position is grant funded and my family relocates every 6-7 years. So, I realized that if I could learn how to effectively design e-Learning courses I would be able to continue to grow professionally whenever I would need to find a new position. That is when I found the program at George Mason University.

The first step in beginning this exciting new chapter in my life is to successfully complete my Master's degree program at George Mason University within the next 2 years. To me, successful completion means to achieve all A's and B's in my courses throughout the program. The challenge with this has been learning to balance school in addition to working and raising my twin daughters. This has really been a struggle for me this first semester because my husband is a Special Agent with the United States Secret Service and he is rarely available to help. This has been particularly true during this current campaign and election year. So far, I have somehow found a way to get it all done this semester.

My current timeline for this program is to graduate with my Master's degree by the end of summer 2018. I will finish my e-Learning Certificate by the end of fall 2018. I am a career switcher, so I have no background knowledge in IDT. This means that I need to be a sponge and soak up as much as I can while I am in this program. I am even considering purposely taking additional elective courses simply to gain as much knowledge as possible before I graduate.

Shortly after I graduate from this program, my husband will be eligible for another transfer. We will be waiting for the agency to assign us a transfer number. Our top two options for this next transfer are either Orlando or Houston. This has greatly influenced the direction that I am working toward in terms of companies. I would have the option of NASA in either of those two cities. I would also have Disney as an option in Orlando. I have researched the options in both of those agencies. Disney has many IDT positions, including post-graduate internships (available within 6 months of graduation). NASA is a little bit more difficult to break into. I would need a "foot in the door" to find a position there.

While attending one of our in-person classes, Dr. Bannan allowed another student to announce an internship opportunity. After reviewing the information, I became very interested in it. It is at the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency and is a summer internship designed for students to utilize while still in their respective degree programs. With the information about NASA in mind, I became very interested in this internship. This would be a solid "foot in the door" with a government agency. If I could earn a permanent position with this agency, I would have a better opportunity to transfer to other government agencies as we are relocated, including NASA. After careful consideration, I felt it was best that I not apply this upcoming summer. The application was due shortly after I began the fall 2016 semester and I didn't have any grades or portfolio items to share since I had just started the program. I am planning on submitting an

application for this internship program for summer 2018. The application will be due at the beginning of the fall 2017 semester. Long term, this would give me the opportunity to have an actual pension when I retire since federal government positions are available nationwide. The work at the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency is classified, so there are no specific examples of what they do; however, the website does show that they work on military missions and other earth mapping projects. It looks very interesting and I feel that it would bridge well into NASA.

I also became interested in the specialization of UX design when Dr. Bannan showed us the "Design Disruptors" movie during one of our weekly modules. I never realized that this was an option. I really never thought about *who* changed the websites and applications that I utilize. When I watched "Design Disruptors" something spoke to me. I was drawn to the concept that someone spends their time focusing on how to make a certain website or application more humanistic and intuitive by utilizing educational theory and psychology. Although I cannot explain it fully, I had an emotional response to this work and really felt connected to it.

Although some track the history of UX Design back to Leonardo da Vinci, the first person to actually hold the title of "User Experience Architect" was Don Norman in 1995. He joined Apple to work on the development of their human-centered products. He coined the job title that he held (www.blog.invisionapp.com/a-brief-history-of-user-experience). This is still a fairly new field that is still developing.

Unfortunately, I can't find any UX Design elective courses in the Master's degree program at GMU. As a result, I plan on taking some MOOC's that focus on UX design. My hope is that those courses will complement the class structure at GMU and will allow me to show some proficiency in UX design in my portfolio. I will focus on doing this during the summer

2017 and summer 2018 semesters, when my required course load is a bit lighter. I have been looking for courses and there are several through Coursera. I would also like to take some courses in App Design to master creating mobile Apps.

These goals will allow me to travel through the next 2 years without a problem. Tracking my progress through these goals will be simple. I will be able to track my progress through the Master's degree program through report cards and my physical degree (once conferred). The additional training through the MOOC's can be tracked through certificates and/or badges. Those will all be added to my professional e-portfolio to showcase the skills that I have demonstrated proficiency and/or mastery in.

If obtaining a position with the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency does not work out, I would need to find another internship so that I can gain valuable experience in the field. In this situation, I would ultimately like to gain enough experience to be able become an independent contractor and work on projects for multiple companies and disciplines. This would allow my days to remain interesting and engaging. It would also allow me to be available for my daughters as they continue to grow and mature.

All of these goals will utilize cognitive, self-directed, and experiential adult learning theories. I believe that I will spend most of the next 2-3 years in self-directed and experiential learning mode. These methods of learning are very time consuming; however, I feel extremely satisfied when I complete projects and learning goals.

My motivation for getting through these next few years is to be able to create a better life for myself and my girls. I would like to be able to contribute to the family income situation; however, I need to find a way to do that while still being available to my children. Jobs will

come and go; however, I only have one chance to raise responsible, capable, and independent

women. That is the most important job that I can possibly have.