

Original Goals Statement

The development of a career is a progressive and iterative process that continues throughout life. The changes in my career path, although fluctuating, have always had a consistent and adhesive strand that has tied my goals together and provided a clear focus in everything that I do professionally. That strand is a passion to help people with disabilities reach their full potential. As a direct service provider, I believe that I have made a difference in the lives of a few, I am now at a point in my life where I am anxious to make a difference in the lives of many. My goal is to work in a university setting to develop programs that encourage and enabled individuals with disabilities to participate in sports and recreational activities through the use of assistive technology.

Over the past ten years of my professional career I have focused on the academic and professional success of my students and clients through the use of assistive technology. Through my experiences, I have come to the realization that simply giving people access to assistive technology does not ensure success. The ability for someone to succeed has more to do with self-esteem and motivation. I believe that sports and recreational activities play a large part in the development of ones self-esteem and ability to be persistent in all aspects of life

Although there are many opportunities for people with disabilities to get involved in sporting activities, they are often watered down, lacking a legitimate challenge. This is especially true when considering individuals with severe disabilities. However, with access to newly developed virtual environments, there is no limit to what people with disabilities can experience and participate in. I believe that my academic, professional and personal experiences have uniquely prepared me to pursue this area of expertise.

I completed my Baccalaureate in Special Education at Southern Connecticut State University with a minor in Computer Science. It was at SCSU that I worked as a student assistant in the Adaptive Technology Lab and was introduced to the power that assistive technology could have in the academic success of students with disabilities. I decided to pursue my masters degree in assistive technology.

I graduated from Southern Connecticut State University with my teaching certification in Severe Disabilities and Early Childhood Education. I moved to Virginia and began my professional career as a vision teacher, earning my certification at the University of Virginia while completing my first year of teaching. I initially took the job as Vision Teacher in Brunswick County Virginia out of the desperation, not able to find a job in the area of severe disabilities. I soon learned to love working with students who were visually impaired and found it to be an area where assistive technology was abundantly available and essential to success. This experience fueled my desire to pursue my masters degree in assistive technology.

After my first year of teaching I moved to Northern Virginia to take a job as vision teacher for Stafford County. This move enabled me to continue to work in an area I enjoyed, while pursuing my Masters at George Mason University. I spent three years in

Stafford County before being hired at George Mason University as an Administrative Faculty Member at the Center for Human disAbilities, now the Kellar Institute for Human disAbilities.

My experiences working at the Kellar Institute for Human disAbilities have always been challenging. I began as an Assistive Technology Specialist with the Training and Technical Assistance Center (T-TAC). There, I had an opportunity to work with educators in a variety of areas. Although I enjoyed the position and gained a lot of knowledge from it, I was anxious to work with the students at the university level.

In 1997, George Mason University was looking for a way to provide their students and employees with disabilities access to assistive technology services. This gave me an opportunity to reach my goal. I worked with the staff at the Kellar Institute to develop a proposal, which outlined a vision to provide such services. The proposal was funded in 1998. I have taken the lead in developing services that have gained recognition nationally. Through this experience I have seen how the development of quality programs can reach large numbers of people and help to make systematic changes in how services are provided. At the same time, I have had the opportunity to look at the services critically and can see where things can breakdown and become ineffective. I can see where the gaps are and I am eager to close them.

Throughout my life I have been a reflective person and an observer of my environment and the people in it. I have been a member of the disabled community my entire life. I understand some of the obstacles that people with disabilities face and I have a strong desire to help those less fortunate than me, find ways to overcome them.

I have chosen to pursue my Ph.D. at George Mason University for many reasons. I am fortunate in that, as an employee, I have been able to observe the atmosphere of the school first hand. One of the overwhelming attributes I observed is a true commitment to student success and the willingness of the faculty to work collaboratively. In addition, I am impressed by the value placed on entrepreneurship. The opportunities at GMU appear to be endless. As a Ph.D. student, I not only want to learn how to be a leader and make changes that will have a lasting effect on how individuals are educated, I actually want to be a leader and make the changes.