As I reflect upon my initial goal statement that I created on May 27, 2009 I realize that there were three key skills that I hoped to enhance through graduate study. These skills included research, data visualization, and the ability to create a better experience for students navigating through the financial aid process through the use of technology. While creating my capstone portfolio and thinking about what I gained from each course I am pleased that the masters program I chose brought me closer to reaching these goals.

Enhancing my ability to interpret and conduct research was of utmost importance for future advancement within my career. In CEP 822 - Approaches to Educational Research I became familiar with key terminology associated with different strategies of research. Another course that allowed exploration and introduction into the world of research was EAD 942 - Economic Analysis in Education Policy Making.

Interpreting and communicating complicated rules and regulations to those who may not be experts in the field was another important skill to build for daily tasks within my current employment. In JRN 338 - Communicating with Graphics I developed skills using Adobe Illustrator and other software to take complex data and turn it into an appealing visual for the use of a variety of audiences. We live in a very visual culture. Being able to take numbers and create a piece of art from the data is an excellent skill to have, especially when communicating to audiences that are not initially interested in the topic at hand.

In order to create a better experience for students navigating through the financial aid process it is important to understand several factors that were discussed in the following courses. CEP 800 - Psychology of Learning in School and Other Settings was helpful in this area as we explored elements that contribute to the learning experience such as motivation, affordances, and constraints to technology as a part of the learning experience. This allowed me to consider my audience and determine which learning theory would work best. Also, CEP 882 - The Nature and Design of Compelling Experiences was right on target with what I hoped to explore through my coursework. Financial aid can be a very boring and depressing topic. In this course we investigated what elements in fields such as photography, interior design, and video so compelling and how educators can take these elements and incorporate them into our educational programs.

Some of the coursework was quite introductory, particularly in the area of research. When I entered this program I saw it as my final formal educational journey, but now I see it as a beginning to a long life of study and learning. My goals have stayed the same although I feel I now have the important foundation in research, data visualization, and creating compelling experiences to go forward. A goal I have added is learning more about managing people. Most advancement opportunities include the ability to delegate and manage personnel.

I am in the same field I was in at the time of submitting my goal statement. My family has grown as I we welcomed a son in spring 2011. Having two young children and
thinking about their future has strengthened my passion regarding policy issues pertaining to college accessibility and loan indebtedness as state funding and the economy continue to make it more difficult for many to finance a college education. I have also found a love for data visualization after taking JRN 338. At this time I am not sure where this passion will take me, but I am looking forward to the future and I am thankful for the doors that have been opened through obtaining a Master of Arts degree in Educational Technology.